University of Alberta

Representations of Gender in Child Murder Pamphlets of Seventeenth-Century England

by

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Abstract

Seventeenth-century child murder (infanticide) pamphlets are a rich source of information on contemporary gender constructions. Examining the language used to describe murderous men and women highlights the need to integrate the study of both genders. Descriptions such as monstrous, bestial, and inhuman were applied equally to men and women and indicate that gender was not sufficient to classify a woman as "other". Furthermore, the appearance of the devil and the emphasis on divine providence demonstrates the fear of disorder that drove many pamphleteers to lament the greater incidence of crime in the seventeenth century. Additionally, we see that men and women occupied the same spaces in early modern society and that there was no strict division of public and private spaces. While child murder pamphlets are not gendered, they do provide glimpses of contemporary perceptions of the roles of men and women, and highlight the fluidity of early modern gender constructions.

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Introduction

Cultural studies of seventeenth-century Britain have expanded significantly in the last thirty years. Where politics, law, and religion were once thought to be 'proper' subjects of historical inquiry, scholars now recognize the importance of studying women, material culture, issues of agency, children and social roles, among other previously neglected topics. Significantly, the study of gender perceptions and constructions in early modern England have received particular attention. In addition to new subject areas, historians have also come to recognize the importance of using new sources. Diaries, newspapers, print literature, pamphlets, song and drama are being used in an attempt to understand the ways in which contemporaries perceived their world - both natural and social.

This thesis examines a topic of legal interest - child murder - but does not consider the law. Rather, the focus is on the language used in pamphlets and ballads to describe both men and women who committed the crime of child murder. By studying both men and women, I will call into question the methodology of scholars who study gender and women in isolation from men. Second wave feminism of the 1970s saw a surge in the study of previously 'silenced' voices - primarily, women and children. These studies are crucial to current historical work which understands gender as something distinct from a person's sex: gender is a culturally constructed concept, sex is biological.[1] Studying the

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[1] Gisela Bock argues that scholars must do away with the term biology when discussing sex. She contends that the word continues the nature vs. nurture debate and "confirms traditional visions of gender." Thus, gender should be used to describe both that which is culturally constructed and that which is not. Gisela Bock, "Women's History and Gender History: Aspects of an International Debate," *Gender & History* 1:1 (Spring, 1989), 15. However, the advent of postmodern feminism

ways in which gender has been constructed allows scholars to come to a greater understanding of the roles genders have played in societies and to see both continuities and differences over time and between cultures. Yet there has been a trend towards studying early modern men and women in isolation from each other. The focus in recent years has been to study gender constructions of women only in order to understand the roles women played in early societies. However, by ignoring the masculine, these scholars imply that it was naturalized, unquestioned, and static. They homogenize masculinity and do not allow for the differences that they have correctly identified in female gender constructions. Furthermore, this privileges the "white, heterosexual, wealthy men" who are empowered by patriarchy and who needed to subjugate other men as well as women.[2] Thus, they recognize the contested space women held in early modern homes, but do so while ignoring the male half of the population. While it is true that women held a precarious position in seventeenth-century society, we must also come to a greater understanding of the roles men played and the contradictions that governed their lives. In this way, scholars may also come to a better understanding of the ways in which women negotiated the restrictions placed upon them and the ways in which they influenced male behavior.[3]

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has caused some scholars to question this division. They argue that biology is, in part, based on political and cultural traditions that need to be questioned. Tina Chanter, *Gender Key Concepts in Philosophy* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 4-5.

2 Andrew P. Williams, ed., *The Image of Manhood in Early Modern Literature Viewing the Male* (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1999), xi-xii.

3 According to Andrew Williams, studying men from a feminist perspective does not mean that scholars can ignore or forgive the misogynist and violent actions of men. Williams, *Manhood*, xi.

Rather than employ the traditional documentary sources of political history for this study, I have chosen to focus on print literature and the language used in pamphlets, broadsides, and ballads to investigate the ways in which men and women who murdered their children were described.[4] When employing literary sources, the historian must, of course, be careful to avoid looking for historical 'facts' in the documents. By its very nature, literature is subject to the author's desire to develop a narrative. There is no obligation to record 'truth' when writing works of fiction. For this reason, seventeenth-century print sources can be used to study representations of events, many of which are also found within other historical documents, but not to determine the veracity of those events. This does not negate the value of literature for the cultural historian. Often, literature reflects the concerns of society. In this way, literary sources can mirror "patterns of thought and understanding, modes of language, rituals of life, and ways of thinking"[5]. A number of historians recognize the validity of using literary sources. Nancy Partner observes that evidence can be anything that survives from the past. However, it is only through a careful reading of these sources that we may be able to discern that which they never intended to reveal.[6]

Pamphlet literature has been denigrated by some scholars as "yellow press" that is not

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4 I am using the term pamphlet to describe any printed source shorter than twenty-five pages. These include printed ballads, broadsides, and chapbooks.

5 John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

6 Nancy Partner, "Making up Lost Time: Writing on the Writing of History," *Speculum* 61:1 (1986), 104-105.

useful as a scholarly source.[7] Although it is different from traditional sources in that it is dangerous to assume that pamphlets contain factual and unaltered accounts, literature is useful for studying ways in which men and women were thought about and described. While acknowledging that these sources are rarely written by the lower strata of society, there is general agreement among scholars of print culture that everybody had access to them.[8] While the number of people who could read was relatively low, many heard pamphlets read by others. Joad Raymond says that there was a thirst for news and stories in early modern England. However, he goes on to point out that widespread reading or hearing of the news through pamphlets "does not encompass or guarantee an equality of participation"[9]. Thus, while many have argued that all levels of English society either read or heard pamphlet literature read, we cannot assume that the lower strata participated in the same numbers as the upper echelons. With this in mind, I am not using print sources as a resource to study the culture of the lower levels of society. In order to determine whether the pamphlets about child murder reflect the belief systems of the lower social ranks, it would be necessary to study court documents about child murder in

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7 J.C. Davis, *Fear, myth, and history: the Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press).

8 While the authors of ballads are often anonymous, many ballads that were deemed scandalous or libelous survive in the court records. In these cases authorship can be determined. Ballads were often composed by 'ordinary' men and women in response to what they saw around them. Adam Fox, "Ballads, Libels and Popular Ridicule in Jacobean England," *Past and Present* 145 (November 1994), 49. See also Deborah A. Symonds, *Weep Not for Me: Women, Ballads, and Infanticide in Early Modern Scotland* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1997).

9 Joad Raymond, "The Newspaper, Public Opinion, and the Public Sphere in the Seventeenth Century." In Joad Raymond, ed., *News, Newspapers, and Society in Early Modern Britain* (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 1999), 109, 123.

order to understand whether similar language was used in real life situations. Many of the pamphlets discussed in this thesis are based on court records, some of which have been preserved. A comparison of these records with the pamphlets may indicate a similarity in the ways the dominant culture - that is, the Puritans who influenced social, cultural, moral, and legal aspects of much of seventeenth-century England - and lower cultures thought and behaved.[10] For this reason, I am using these records to study the ways in which pamphleteers - who were often sponsored by members of the upper middling levels of society and, thus, reflected dominant ideals - represented male and female child murderers. In doing so, I will spend some time on historical methodology and argue for a greater integration in the study of genders.

While many pamphlets were based on court records, it is important to recognize that the information from the records was filtered by the pamphlet's author. Raymond emphasizes that readers were active and often manipulated texts for their needs: "they culled fragments from multitudes and construed general propositions from particulars; they reworked and rewrote texts through their reading"[11]. Thus, these pamphlets could

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It should be noted that it would be impossible to determine which direction culture was transmitted in these cases. It could be argued that the dominant culture was repeating language it had heard in court records and using it in pamphlet literature in order to use the pamphlets in a didactic nature. Conversely, the populace may have adopted language it had heard in pamphlet literature and employed this in court situations.

I am here using the term Puritan to describe those whose calls for religious reforms influenced all aspects of seventeenth-century life in England. While the true meaning of what it meant to be Puritan has been debated, I have chosen to use the word in a broad sense to describe the dominant power structure of the time.

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Raymond, "The Newspaper," 124. See also Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 28.

have multiple meanings. First, the author himself was active in deciding which information to include from public records. Furthermore, these 'fragments' were often reworked to suit the didactic or economic goals of the author. Secondly, the reader may have taken different meanings from the final product than that which was intended by either the author or the court itself.[12] This may lead one to question the value of these documents in understanding the language used by contemporary authors to describe crime. For, if the meanings changed each time a pamphlet reached new hands, what can it really tell us? Yet, we do not ask this question of traditional political and legal treatises even though they, too, go through the same transformations. Regardless of the ways in which pamphlets were received, they still tell us something about the intentions of the author. That is the central question asked in this thesis - what language did these authors use in representing child murderers, and what can the pamphlets tell us about seventeenth-century gender constructions? Furthermore, does the language change between authors or when men and women are described? The sources indicate that similar language is used by all of the authors who write about murder and, furthermore, that it does not change between descriptions of men and descriptions of women. This in itself suggests that we need to understand both male and female roles and the ways in which these roles interacted with and influenced each other in order to try to understand seventeenth-century English culture.

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Ian Atherton argues that all news, including pamphlets, relied "heavily upon spoken transmission." This allows for yet more transformations and manipulations of the original story. Ian Atherton, "The Itch Grown a Disease: Manuscript Transmission of News in the Seventeenth Century," In Joad Raymond, ed., *News, Newspapers, and Society in Early Modern Britain*, (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 1999), 39.

This thesis is divided into three main chapters, each of which is a direct response to scholarship which has studied female criminals in isolation from male criminals. Following a brief historiographical summary in Chapter One, Chapter Two considers representations of women as "other". Susan Staub argues that women were portrayed as "unnatural and monstrous," or as being of a different order than men.[13] Thus, when we study accounts of female child murderers, we find that they are described as unnatural, barbaric and inhumane: these are women who live outside of Christian society. I will discuss this representation of women alongside similar representations of men. Chapter Three considers the role of the Devil in child murder accounts. Sandra Clark contends that the appearance of the Devil as the guide of women who committed murder was the author's way of removing a women's agency.[14] In this way, the female child murderer was contained and had her power removed because she was unable to upset order of her own volition. If the Devil is used as a rhetorical device in representations of female murderers only, this is a plausible argument. However, if we find similar reasons for murder applied to men, we must consider other explanations. The fourth chapter discusses the locations of the various murders and the role of the home in seventeenth-century society. Some scholars have argued that there was a sharp private/public sphere divide which men and women did not cross. Thus, women, as overseers of the

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13 Susan Staub, *Nature's Cruel Stepdames: Murderous Women in the Street Literature of Seventeenth Century England* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 81.

14 Sandra Clark, *Women and Crime in the Street Literature of Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 55.

household, committed murder in their homes, because "the mother's actions represent[ed] a contest for power within the household"[15]. By representing female murder as occurring within the home, pamphleteers highlight the disorder caused by female murderers. Given this argument, it is necessary to consider accounts of both female and male murderers to determine whether the sources support a private/public dichotomy.

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15 Staub, *Stepdames*, 16.

Chapter One:
Historiographical Analysis

Surprisingly little has been written about child murder in early modern England. Scholars writing on the topic are faced with the difficulty of accessing court records which are notoriously fragmented. In cases where records are well preserved, there is rarely more than a few years at a time extant. This makes comparative studies difficult, if not impossible. Furthermore, it is accepted that all crime is under-reported, especially neonatal and child murder. While estimates can be made about true numbers, they are speculative and often based on outdated population statistics. Generally, child murder is incorporated into larger studies of crime and so receives little attention in light of the greater availability of court records for the murder of adults. In cases where special attention is given to this crime, studies are usually published in journals and are studies of only a small segment of the topic. To date, only two full examinations of the crime have been published. This leaves a gap in the scholarship which must be addressed. In some cases, using theoretical models can prove useful to the historian who can then ask new questions of the documents and read existing documents in new ways. One concept that is proving useful in opening up studies of early modern child murder is gender.

While there has been a great deal written on gender constructions and the implications of those constructions for early modern women, the same attention is rarely given to men. Historians may assume that so much has been written about men that there is no need to continue the study. However, little has been written using the theoretical background upon which gender studies are based. Arguably such studies will open up new

understandings of men's live in early modern England. Current work on gender constructions highlights female subjectivity within the patriarchal system of the period and emphasizes the ways in which women's lives were curtailed by that system. However, new scholarship has come to some interesting conclusions about the ways in which women negotiated the obstacles they faced and acknowledges that women had more agency than previously understood. Such studies must compel historians to question long- held feminist notions about patriarchy and its role in controlling both women's and men's lives.

Child Murder

A study of representations of child murder must begin with a brief background to the introduction of child murder legislation in 1624. Traditionally, English ecclesiastical courts dealt with all cases of neonatal murder and child murder because they were considered moral crimes.[16] As early as the seventh century, Theodore prescribed penances for mothers and fathers who murdered their children either directly or through exposure.[17] The tradition of ecclesiastical justice for moral crimes continued until the

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16 Numerous scholars use the term infanticide to discuss the murder of an infant. However, the term did not come into use until the middle of the seventeenth century (*Oxford English Dictionary*) and so was not legally recognized prior to this. Furthermore, the majority of the pamphlets used in this study discuss the murder of children under the age of nine, rather than infants. For these two reasons I will use the term child murder to discuss the murder of both infants and older children by adults.

17 Theodore, *Penitential*, trans. John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer in *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal* libri poenitentiales *and Selections from Related Documents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938, 1990). Interestingly, Theodore recognized that poverty was a mitigating factor in these cases and prescribed lower penances for parents who may have felt that their only option was to murder their children.

high Middle Ages, when these cases came before the King's courts. However, few child murder trials were held until, under the guidance of Elizabeth I, the secular courts increasingly began to monitor the morality of the nation and the number of child murder cases appearing before the courts increased.[18]

Child murder legislation developed out of poor laws directed at parents who were unable to maintain their children. In 1576, legislation was passed that gave justices the power to commit "lewd" women who bore chargeable bastards to jail.[19] While both men and women could be charged under the 1576 act, the majority of cases charged the mother only. Scholars have argued that this disparity in punishment indicates a greater fear of the dangers presented by single women and illicit sex than of men.[20] While this is a reasonable argument given the available sources, we must also consider the practical implications of the law: women bore physical signs of pregnancy which made them an easier target for the justice system. Additionally, it was more practical for men to flee the

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Peter Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England 1558-1803* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1984), 7. It is impossible to know if the number of cases increased because child murder increased or because the community began to take more notice of the crime. It can also be argued that population increases account for the higher number of indictments for child murder. Yet, Hoffer and Hull find that the increase in population does not mirror the increase in convictions and so this can only partially account for the difference in numbers. However, during this period, various 'moral' crimes, including drinking gaming, dress, and ale-house keeping, increasingly came under the scrutiny of legislators and new statutes regulating morality were passed. As moral crimes came under increasingly rigorous legislation, child murder became more visible. Hoffer and Hull, 13.

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18 Eliz. I, c.3. Cited in Mark Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder Women, illegitimacy and the courts in eighteenth-century England* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 30.

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Staub, *Stepdames*, 8; Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 11.

parish and avoid charges of fathering a chargeable bastard.[21] In cases where the woman named the father and he was still in the parish, he was generally punished. In her discussion of early modern prosecution, Garthine Walker points out that "disparity and discrimination are not synonymous. Men and women were not sentenced differently for homicides that were perceived to be alike"[22]. Thus, we cannot infer from the higher numbers of women being convicted of bearing bastards than men that women were more feared.

The economic implications of the 1576 poor law statute are clear, and indicate that parishes were loathe to take on the support of children whose parents were unable to maintain them.[23] One unintended result of the legislation was an apparent rise in child murder cases, especially neonatal murders by unwed mothers. Possibly this was because of the shame attached to poverty which caused parents to murder their children rather than admit that they needed financial assistance from the parish.[24] As a result, courts

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Betty S. Travitsky, "Child Murder in English Renaissance Life and Drama," *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England An Annual Gathering of Research, Criticism, and Reviews* VI, Leeds Barroll, ed. (New York: AMS Press, 1993), 67.

22

Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 158.

23

Walter J. King, "Punishment for Bastardy in Early Seventeenth-Century England," *Albion* 10:2 (Summer, 1978). King argues that economics was the primary cause of the 1576 law and a direct cause of the 1624 statute.

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Staub, *Stepdames*, 65; Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 17; Mark Jackson, "Suspicious Infant Deaths: the Statute of 1624 and medical evidence at coroners' inquests," In Michael Clark and Catherine Crawford, eds., *Legal medicine in history* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 66.

began to take greater notice of cases which they had previously dismissed. However, it was difficult to prosecute cases of neonatal murder because the burden of proof rested on the prosecution, who had to prove that the child was born alive and subsequently murdered, either directly or indirectly through exposure. Mothers could claim that a child was still-born and there was little or no forensic evidence to the contrary.[25] As a result, while more cases of neonatal murder appeared before the courts, conviction rates did not rise in corresponding numbers. In order to increase conviction rates, parliament passed the *Act to prevent the destroying and murthering of bastard children* in 1624. The act significantly changed the ways in which the legal system treated women charged with murdering their children. The act read:

> An act to prevent the destroying and murthering of bastard children.
>
> WHEREAS, many lewd women that have been delivered of bastard children, to avoid their shame, and to escape punishment, do secretly bury or conceal the death of their children, and after, if the child be found dead, the said woman do alledge, that the said child was born dead; whereas it falleth out sometimes (although hardly it is to be proved) that the said child or children were murthered by the said women, their lewd mothers, or by their assent or procurement.
>
> II. For the preventing therefor of this great mischief, be it enacted by the authority of this present parliament, That if any woman after one month next ensuing the end of this session of parliament be delivered of any issue of her body, male or female, which being born alive, should by the laws of this realm be a bastard, and that she endeavour privately, either by drowning or secret burying thereof, or any other way, either by herself or the procuring of

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25 Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder*, 15. For a discussion of the ways in which the 1624 statute directly affected the medical profession, see Jackson, "Suspicious Infant Deaths." Jackson points out that medical professionals had few means of determining whether a child had been murdered at birth unless clear signs of physical injury were present. Methods such as determining whether the child was premature, or floating the lungs were largely ineffective.

> others, so to conceal the death thereof, as that it may not come to light, whether it were born alive or not, but be concealed: in every such case the said mother so offending shall suffer death as in case of murther, except such mother can make proof by one witness at the least, that the child (whose death was by her so intended to be concealed) was born dead.[26]

Under this statute, the prosecution no longer had to prove murder because the burden of proof now lay with the defense to prove that the child was still-born, and there was no more forensic evidence to prove this than there was to prove live birth. Arguably, the references to secrecy and concealment reflect the Puritan idea that nothing can be hidden from God's eyes and so must come to light: this made secret crimes a legitimate concern of the court. Furthermore, there is an element of morality in this statute in its references to 'lewd' women who bear 'bastard' children. Thus, unwed mothers were a target of special consideration under this statute. It is, however, unlikely that purely moral concerns were the focus of this law. If that were the case, all children who were illegitimate, including those conceived through an adulterous relationship, would be included. Rather, it appears as if economic concerns informed this law, just as they did the bastardy laws of the previous century: children born to unwed mothers would almost certainly have to be maintained by the parish as neither their families nor the employers of servant girls would be likely to take them in.

Following the legislation, conviction rates for neonatal murder increased significantly. Additionally, the demographic of those charged with child murder shifted. Prior to passage of the law, approximately equal numbers of married and unwed women were

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26 21 Jac. I c. 27, 1624. Cited in Staub, *Stepdames*, 64.

indicted for neonatal or child murder. Afterwards, few married mothers were indicted, while the numbers of unwed mothers who were indicted and convicted rose. Susan Staub states that "both legally and in *popular culture* . . . the focus on sexuality is limited to unmarried infanticidal mothers," yet she later contradicts herself when she acknowledges that few pamphlets and broadsides dealt with unmarried mothers.[27] Rather, the narratives generally revolve around married mothers who murdered older children. Staub also points out that married mothers were rarely prosecuted by the courts and implies that this was a result of a Puritan fear of the uncontrolled nature of female sexuality, especially among single women.[28] Yet she has neglected to consider the nature of the 1624 statute: married women could not be prosecuted under this law and so would have to be charged with murder. The burden of proof then fell back onto the prosecution rather than the defense. This would also explain the rise in conviction rates among unwed women - if married women had to be prosecuted for murder rather than concealment, it would be as difficult to convict them as it had been prior to 1624. We must question whether the 1624 statute was directed at single women primarily because they were perceived to be a sexual threat. Arguably, their marginal status as single women was as important because it meant that they did not have the protection of a husband, or the social standing that accompanied marriage in early-modern England because a married woman supported the feminine ideal and so did not subvert society. A woman with a husband and social

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27 Staub, *Stepdames*, 63. Italics mine.

28 Staub, *Stepdames*, 62.

standing would be able to provide witnesses to her character much more easily than would an unmarried woman who had given birth. Proving a married woman's guilt would also be more difficult because such women could not easily be charged with "avoid[ing] their shame" which was an important element under this statute. Furthermore, the extreme shame involved with being labeled a cuckold could prevent some husbands from publicly admitting that their wives had had an adulterous affair. Thus, these women would be even further protected by their marriages.

* * * * *

Seventeenth-century child murder has been studied from a variety of perspectives. Several scholars have studied the legal, others the social, while still others have studied the literary aspects of the subject. Notably, most have restricted their studies to women and have not considered the ways in which both men and women participated in child murder and none has undertaken a thorough study of how male child murderers were represented in popular literature.

Susan S. Staub studies the literary aspects of female murderers. In *Nature's Cruel Stepdames: Murderous Women in the Street Literature of Seventeenth Century England*, Staub argues that the large number of pamphlets which discuss females who commit murder "suggest a high level of popular anxiety about female criminality during the period"[29]. Yet, the majority of crime pamphlets discuss the crimes of men and, moreover, many refer specifically to the prevalence of violence in England without singling women

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29 Staub, *Stepdames*, 7.

out as especially culpable. Thus, while Staub argues that the focus of the literature demonstrates anxiety about female criminality specifically, the records themselves indicate that criminality in general was of greater concern.

Staub argues that the crimes she discusses, infanticide, child-murder, and husband murder are gender-specific and "fly in the face of women's role as wife and mother"[30]. I contend, however, that the first two crimes were also committed by men, albeit to a lesser extent. Moreover, "husband murder"could be relabeled "spouse murder" which is not gender specific. Staub argues that infanticide was a gendered crime because the 1624 statute focuses on "women who bear bastards"[31]. However, these women were not accused of infant murder, but of concealment of pregnancy and the body of their child. Thus *concealment*, rather than murder, was gendered in the case of women who hid the death of their illegitimate child. However, both men and women could be convicted of child murder if found culpable in the death of a child. In addition, as will be discussed in a later chapter, when fathers commit these crimes, they too "fly in the face" of society's prescribed role for men.

Staub highlights an intriguing aspect of pamphlet literature about child murder. While the majority of those convicted by the courts were young single women, the popular literature focuses on married mothers who murder their children. This suggests that the murder of a child by a wife was more shocking because it was less commonplace,

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30 Staub, *Stepdames*, 12.

31 21 James I c. 27.

but it also indicates an anxiety about maternal power.[32] However, it is not known if child murder by married women was less commonplace than that committed by single women. Prior to the 1624 Act, roughly equal numbers of single and married women were convicted of infant murder.[33] As already discussed, it was much easier to convict a single woman after the 1624 Act which may account for the apparent decrease in the number of convictions of married women. Modern society is similarly likely to expect a marginalized member of society, such as a homeless person, to be more capable of violent crime than a middle-class businessman; a crime committed by an outsider is less shocking than one committed by an accepted member of society. Likewise, in seventeenth-century England where married women epitomized Protestant ideals of women who recognized their place in society and, thus, contributed to the well-being of that society. Presumably, murder committed by 'good' women was more sensational than that committed by a marginalized single woman because it was less expected of them. This may help explain why so many pamphlets focused on married women.

In her discussion of child-murder, as opposed to neonatal murder, Staub argues that the pamphlets portray an ambiguity between a woman's roles as "mother, nurturer, teacher" and member of English society. The mother's role "was a contested site of female empowerment" which could be played out in the most extreme manner –

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32 Staub, *Stepdames*, 15.

33 Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 11.

murder.[34] According to Staub, married women, unlike unmarried women, were not attempting to avoid shame, but were often trying to protect their children from perceived dangers, such as religious impurity or the effects of poverty. In response to this threat, the mother determines that her best course of action is to murder her child and, subsequently, to commit suicide: "the pamphlets seek to undermine maternal authority by constructing it as dangerous and violent"[35]. However, Staub fails to contrast this with paternal authority and the damage done to it when a man committed child murder, a point to which we will return in a later chapter. Additionally, Staub does not consider that women often successfully negotiated the difficulties of their lives without resorting to murder - in so doing Staub is undermining the position of seventeenth-century women by making them seem weaker than they were.

In "Child Murder in English Renaissance Life and Drama," Betty Travitsky explores representations of child murder in English literature. While Travitsky highlights the misogynistic nature of sixteenth and seventeenth-century writings, she neglects to discuss those writings which were written as a reaction against demeaning representations of women.[36] Travitsky focuses on dramas in which women are portrayed as dangerous and

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[34] Staub, *Stepdames*, 42.

[35] Staub, *Stepdames*, 47.

[36] Joseph Swetnam's diatribe against women is often cited as an example of the extreme misogyny of seventeenth-century Britain. However, Swetnam's extreme views are not supported by other authors. In fact, many wrote against him. It has been argued that the author of "Esther Hath Hanged Haman" was a man writing under a woman's name. If this is true, it is indicative that contemporary men felt that Swetnam went too far. Furthermore, numerous pamphlets about the roles of men and women in society extolled the good virtues of women and highlighted the importance of women for the maintenance of society. Rachel Speght, *A mouzell for Melastomus, the cynicall bayter of, and foule*

deceitful. She acknowledges one play in which a mother is portrayed in a positive manner, but does not indicate whether there were others of a similar nature.[37] Furthermore, she only briefly discusses two plays which portray murderous fathers and argues that the male child killer is shown deference.[38]

Using court records, Laura Gowing studies the narratives women used to describe pregnancy and birth.[39] She highlights the ambiguous understandings of pregnancy and reproductivity which allowed women to construct narratives about their condition without acknowledging their pregnancy. They often viewed pregnancy as a disease and their interpretations of their physical condition could be elaborate. Women's narratives continued to maintain secrecy even when discussing birth. Gowing argues that labor itself had to be erased because it was the purview of honest women bearing legitimate children. Narratives about unwed mothers contained accounts of short, painless births which explained why these women did not call for help when labor began. Thus, it was

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mouthed barker against Euahs sex. Or an apologeticall answere to that irreligious and illiterate pamphlet made by Io. Sw. and by him intituled, The arraignement of women (London : Printed by Nicholas Okes for Thomas Archer, and are to be sold at his shop in Popes-head-Pallace, 1617); Jane Anger, *Jane Anger her Protection for vvomen To defend them against the scandalous reportes of a late surfeiting louer, and all otherlike Venerians that complaine so to bee ouercloyed with womens kindnesse* (Written by Ia: A. Gent., At London : Printed by Richard Iones, and Thomas Orwin, 1589).

37 Travitsky, *Child Murder*, 69.

38 Travitsky, *Child Murder*, 70-71.

39 Laura Gowing, "Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England," *Past and Present* 156 (August 1997).

common knowledge that immoral women bore their children more easily.[40] According to Gowing, labor as work was reserved for legitimate births while single women's labor was understood to be "shamefully easy"[41].

As with the signs of pregnancy, which were often interpreted as dropsy, colic, or wind, labor narratives could become something different. For example, a woman could have a night of extreme colic or vomiting, which was reminiscent of birth. These narrative devices were used to "recast one familiar bodily experience to cover another"[42]. After birth, it was not uncommon for some women to continue to reshape and rewrite events just as they had during the pregnancy by refusing to admit they had born a child. However, these women found it difficult to abandon the body of the new-born. They often kept them physically close, which led to discovery.[43] If the infant's body was not found accidentally, then suspicious neighbours often began a search for the body. The community finally erased all attempts at secrecy and the discovery of the body became a public spectacle.[44] While Gowing briefly mentions male roles in the process of discovery, she does not investigate the narratives men used. Medieval medical

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40 Gowing, "Secret Births," 99.

41 Gowing, "Secret Births," 99-100.

42 Gowing, "Secret Births," 101.

43 Gowing, "Secret Births," 108.

44 Gowing, "Secret Births," 111.

practitioners had a number of explanations for bodily functions they did not understand. Additionally, the male members of a suspected woman's community understood that their actions must be circumspect. It would be valuable to ask where these ideas came from, and the ways in which male narratives reflected their concerns for their community and their understandings of female narratives. In this way it may be possible to further access the ways that male narratives reflect seventeenth-century understandings of masculinity.

In *Women and Crime in the Street Literature of Early Modern England*, Sandra Clark investigates literary representations of female criminals. Clark is not attempting to study the factual nature of literary sources, but "consider[s] how, and with what interest in mind, crimes committed by women are shaped as subjects for representation in various forms within the developing marketplace of print"[45]. Clark's primary focus is on women, although she occasionally gives passing reference to representations of male infanticides and murderers. However, she dismisses these sources, implying that they are not representative of the ways in which men were depicted in print literature. The subject of Clark's argument is the patriarchal aspects of pamphlet literature and the ways in which it reinforced women's subjectivity to men. She dismisses the ways in which the literature also restricted and judged male behavior.

In his discussion of eighteenth-century child murder, Mark Jackson also investigates the women who committed child murder.[46] Jackson's focus is on the murder of newborns

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45 Clark, *Women and Crime*, ix.

46 Jackson, *New-Born Child Murder*.

rather than older children, and he uses medical and legal records as his primary sources. Jackson situates infant murder within its broader social, legal, and medical context in order to understand why women committed infant murder and the ways these women were treated by contemporary society. While studying the changes to the legal aspects of child murder, Jackson considers how attitudes about the involvement of men changed throughout the eighteenth century and argues that they were increasingly held accountable for their actions. However, while the writers of legal treatises indicated that men were often to blame for infant murder, the courts themselves rarely prosecuted them.

In *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England, 1558-1803*, Peter Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull study the development of child murder legislation and compare the crime and its punishment in England and its North American colonies. Rather than exploring the literary aspects of child murder, this study is a statistical analysis of court records and attempts to demonstrate the prevalence of child murder and its prosecution. Hoffer and Hull argue that, after the 1624 Statute was passed, conviction rates of single women increased significantly, while murder rates in general did not follow the same pattern. They contend that the perceived lack of morality among single women was the deciding factor in this shift.[47] Hoffer and Hull situate this increased moral vigilance within a breakdown of the social order. As a result, the community began to play a larger role in the enforcement of laws and neighbours were increasingly vigilant about the

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47 Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 24.

conduct of those around them.[48] Unfortunately, Hoffer and Hull make repeated comparisons of child murder to witchcraft. This is dangerous because the sources do not reflect a connection between the two crimes, indicating that they are of a different order. While numerous pamphlets make a connection between the involvement of the Devil in the commission of child murder, they do not go so far as to imply witchcraft. Furthermore, Hoffer and Hull conclude that morality, or the desire to curtail the activities of "lewd" women was the cause of the 1624 statute, while Laura Gowing points to social and economic concerns as being the driving factor behind the legislation.

As part of her study of women who committed crimes in Germany, Ulinka Rublack investigates infanticide in early modern society.[49] Like Laura Gowing, Rublack considers the narratives that women built around pregnancy and childbirth. Unfortunately, Rublack compares child murder by women to manslaughter cases by men. In so doing, she concludes that men who committed manslaughter were treated less harshly than women who committed child murder. Arguably, it is not appropriate to compare child murder with manslaughter: the two are not the same crime and it would be more useful to use charges of murder rather than manslaughter.[50] It is possible this may have produced very different results, although there is no doubt the women in Germany were treated harshly

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48 Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 28.

49 Ulinka Rublack, *The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.

50 Prior to the 1624 Statute all cases of neonatal and child murder were tried as murder. After the statute, which only addressed unmarried women, men and married women were still tried for murder in the suspicious death of a child.

for choosing to maintain their illegitimate child or for committing child murder.

It is apparent from this brief summary of the current scholarship on seventeenth-century child murder that a number of areas still remain to be studied. It will be beneficial for historians to borrow theoretical paradigms from other disciplines which may open up even more avenues of research. Additionally, sources such as those used in this study will need to be integrated with traditional evidence such as court records and parliamentary debates.

Gender in Early Modern England

The study of gender developed out of early feminist writings which allowed previously silenced segments of the population to be heard. Women and their roles in society had formerly been regarded in historical study as unworthy subject matter. In part, this was because history was about politics, the law, and religion - all areas to which women had restricted access. However, this attitude was also a consequence of the control that men in power had over both the making and writing of history. As a result, groups whose role in shaping society was not acknowledged were not studied - these became the 'silenced' voices which feminist studies sought to make loud. Feminists shed light not only on the important roles women have played in history, but also on the importance of studying other social divisions as well: children, race, economic disparity, and religious difference. Although I recognize the importance of this era of historical development, I am not going to focus on the feminist movement within the study of history. Neither am I going to spend time reviewing the theoretical changes that have led

to the development of gender studies.[51] Rather, my interest lies in how scholars study gender in early modern England.

While Joan Scott's claim that "gender is a useful category of analysis" is so familiar as to be almost a cliché, it is applicable here.[52] Using gender to study society is no different than using politics, the law, or religion. The category must be used differently because it is studying different phenomena, but it is still a category around which historical studies can be built. As gender is understood to be culturally constructed, it is particularly useful in studying cultural topics. Culture is distinct to time and place - while it can be transferred, the transference itself involves change until the original model has been replaced by something new and different.[53] A contemporary example is the colonization of North America by Britain. Much of the culture of Britain was transferred to North America along with the legal and political system. As law and politics changed, so, too, did the cultural values of the new colonies until they were almost unrecognizable from Britain's. Even those societies recognized as 'western' have different cultural values and systems. Thus, those using gender in historical studies are given the

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According to Joy Parr, one of the key factors in the shift from women's history to gender history is the understanding that historical difference is not immutable. Gender history assumes that there is no male or female identity, but rather many, and that those identities are historically flexible. Joy Parr, "Gender History and Historical Practice, In Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld, eds., *Gender and History in Canada* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1996), 13.

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Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." *The American Historical Review*, 91:5 (Dec., 1986), 1053-1075.

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Gisela Bock alleges that gender "must be perceived [of] as context-specific and context-dependant." Bock, "Women's History," 11.

opportunity to compare and contrast numerous conceptions and constructions of gender across cultures and times.

One of the most critical things to come out of feminist studies is the recognition that there are many roles for women. Women as a group are not homogenous, nor is the concept of "woman" immutable across time and space. Diversity among women as a group must be recognized and taken into account.[54] Thus, women's studies encompasses more than the study of a faceless crowd: it includes the study of women of different races, religions, and social and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, within these divisions lie yet more divisions. Thus, feminist history has allowed the topics of study to expand exponentially so that, today, few groups can claim to be ignored by history.[55] As with the study of gender, the study of social roles must be understood within their specific contexts.

Scholars studying gender question the ways in which women and men in past societies understood themselves and their places within those societies and how their beliefs fashioned their ideas of what it meant to be woman or man. When considering early modern England, few studies of masculinity and the meanings of maleness have been undertaken.[56] The majority of gender scholarship focuses on women and the ways

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54 Gisela Bock, "Women's History," 8.

55 Joy Parr argues that recent developments "expand the historian's compass, by broadening the range of concepts and activities understood to be made and changed through time." Joy Parr, "Gender History."

56 For excellent examples of scholarship which studies masculinity and what it meant to be a man in the early modern period, see: Will Fisher, "The Renaissance Beard: Masculinity in Early Modern

in which patriarchy shaped the ways both men and women understood the meanings of what it meant to be a woman. Furthermore, studies on crime in particular tend to follow this model and isolate women and men and to focus on women alone, even while purporting to be studying gender.[57]

Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford undertook an extensive study of all areas of women's lives in early modern England, including the major stages of life, their work experiences, friendships, and political participation. The result is a rich, thorough study which opens a window into the lives of many early modern women. Mendelson and Crawford's stated intention is to "understand women's experience of life and world in early modern England"[58]. Interestingly, they say that they felt they knew a great deal about men's lives, but had little knowledge of ordinary women. Following the changes to feminist studies, they attempt to understand women's lives in a variety of situations and to see the interactions between different groups of women. Yet, they did not see the validity of using a similar approach to the study of men to come to new understandings of what it meant to be male in the same period. A study of men from a feminist perspective

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England," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54:1 (Spring 2001); Michael S. Kimmel, "From Lord and Master to Cuckold and Fop: Masculinity in 17th-Century England." In Michael S. Kimmel, *The History of Men: Essays in the History of American and British Masculinities* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2005; Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and David Kuchta, *The Three-piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England 1550-1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

57 Margaret L. Arnot and Cornelie Usborne, "Why Gender and Crime? Aspects of an International Debate," In Margaret L. Arnot and Cornelie Usborne, eds., *Gender and Crime in Modern Europe* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 4.

58 Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 1.

would likely reveal a similar lack of homogeneity among early modern men.

Mendelson and Crawford conclude that, while women's experiences were different from men's throughout the period they study, patriarchal responses to women were remarkably consistent. This does not mean that there was no change, rather there was adaptation within the dominant political and social discourses which enabled men to maintain the "gender order"[59]. Thus, regardless of the changes women were able to effect, they were still subservient to the patriarchal structure of their society. Most interestingly, they reveal that, while men's lives seemed to progress in a somewhat linear fashion, the same could not be said of women. Rights that women assumed at the beginning of the seventeenth century had eroded within a short time. According to Mendelson and Crawford, this was because, as contradictions within patriarchy were illuminated, men had to develop strategies by which to hide those contradictions.[60] Joy Parr cites David Morgan who notes that the relative power of men compared to women was static. He then asks what made men different so that their privileges were confirmed rather than questioned. The subtle difference between Mendelson and Crawford's conclusions about the static nature of patriarchy and that of Morgan is important and opens new avenues of enquiry because it allows the question of power to be turned around: rather than ask whether dominance is a characteristic of masculinity, scholars

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59 Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, 432.

60 Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, 434. Mendelson and Crawford here echo the sentiment of Judith Bennet when she argued for a study of patriarchy as a phenomenon which is not static but fluctuates in response to external pressures. Judith M. Bennett, "Feminism and History." *Gender and History* 1.3 (Autumn 1989), 260-261 passim.

should enquire as to whether masculinity was a character of dominance.[61] Mendelson and Clark go on to say that women responded by preserving the traditions of women, rather than adopting those of men. According to Mendelson and Crawford, "from women's own point of view, they were guardians of the things that mattered: a world governed by common rights and communal responsibilities, linked by bonds of religion and morality, family and friendship"[62]. By holding these things sacred, women continued to negotiate their own space within the patriarchal restrictions of early modern England.

In *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England*, Anthony Fletcher attempts to understand both men's and women's lives in a variety of contexts. As with other historians of the period, Fletcher has found a dearth of extant records about the ordinary lives of women. Thus, he provides insight into the ways men understood women and the overt means they used to make women conform to their ideological standards, rather than give voice to the women of the period. Fletcher admits that he effectively leaves women's stories out of his account, and attributes this to a lack within the records themselves.[63] Yet Mendelson and Crawford stress that women's voices can be found. They are hidden, but available if the historian is willing to read available sources with new questions in mind. Moreover, they stress the use of "indirect sources" and "reading

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61 David Morgan, *Discovering Men* (London: Routledge, 1992), 29. Cited in Joy Parr, "Gender History," 19-20.

62 Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, 435.

63 Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), xxii.

against the grain" in order to pull out small threads which can then be used to create a broader picture.[64] However, Fletcher's neglect of female voices does not negate his work. Rather, by providing an insightful account of the ways in which patriarchy adapted to changing pressures and deliberately maintained the power of men over women, we can better understand the challenges women faced.

In her study of disorder in early modern Germany and England, Joy Wiltenburg argues that women were consistently portrayed as disorderly and "escaping from male control"[65]. While the concept of disorder has traditionally been used by historians in relation to the early modern household, Wiltenburg expands it into the ways in which women were seen as disorderly outside of the home. She also notes that the control of women was part of a larger project of social control of the entire population.[66] Wiltenburg argues that this was primarily focused on women who, as a result, were increasingly confined to the home. However, Wiltenburg does not go so far as to remove all agency and power from women and stresses that they exerted more control than some historians have acknowledged. She also argues that popular literature which attempted to curtail 'disorderly' women could, in reality, give them a sense of power that was not

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64 Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, 9. Merry Wiesner agrees when she talks about new scholarship that studies gendered language: "These investigations of the real and symbolic relations between gender and power have usually not been based on new types of sources, but have approached some of the most traditional types of historical sources - political treatises, public speeches by monarchs, state documents - with new questions." Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7.

65 Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women*, 7.

66 Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women*, 17.

intended by the authors. For example, women could choose to perceive themselves as powerful within the limits placed upon them within the home. Wiltenburg suggests this may have been one reason why women continued to accept patriarchy.[67]

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In order to understand the ways in which the rhetorical constructions used to describe early modern criminals were gendered, we must look at representations of both men and women who were charged with committing similar types of crimes. The following chapters are suggestive of cultural trends in the way crime was perceived. They permit us to consider the ways in which differences in gender were discussed in the execution of a particular type of crime, child murder. According to Sandra Clark, "contemporary constructions of gender as expressed in social institutions such as law and the family condition" affected the way female criminals were represented in the pamphlet literature.[68] Other scholars have argued that early modern society perceived women who stepped outside the boundaries of acceptable female behavior as a threat to the social order.[69] While the evidence certainly supports this, the explanation does not adequately account for the complexities and ambiguities of early modern gender constructions. By comparing representations of both men and women I will investigate seventeenth-century

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67 Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women*, 254.

68 Clark, *Women and Crime*, 33.

69 Rublack, *Crimes of Women*, 10; Marilyn Francus, "Monstrous Mothers, Monstrous Societies: Infanticide and the Rule of Law in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century England," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21:2 (May 1997), 143; Staub, *Stepdames*, 12.

ideas about gender and demonstrate the importance of considering both sexes in discussions of gender.

Chapter Two

The Unnatural, the Barbarous, the Inhumane: The Marginality of Seventeenth-Century Child Murderers

Seventeenth-century pamphlet literature is a rich source of information on gender constructions. In order to study these constructs, I will first examine accounts of men who committed child murder and then female murderers, and look for patterns in the ways men and women were represented. There are similarities and differences in contemporary descriptions of men and women which are important for determining whether the representations of criminals reflect a misogynistic attitude towards women. The purpose is to consider how representations of crime reflected contemporary concerns about early modern society.[70]

In looking at representations of child murder, two questions immediately come to mind. First, what language was used in the literature to describe child murderers and does it inform us of conceptions of gender? The second question arises because numerous scholars suggest that female criminals were represented as existing outside of the social order. For example, Sandra Clark asserts that female criminals are not defined as women and so must be defined as other, monstrous, bestial, and unnatural.[71] She goes

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Garthine Walker points out that most of the gruesome detail found in crime pamphlets is fictionalized. However, the actors themselves are often historical figures found in court records. "Demons in Female Form: Representations of women and gender in murder pamphlets of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries," In William Zunder and Suzanne Trill, eds., *Writing and the English Renaissance* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), 124. Sandra Clark says that there are often gaps between actual events and literary representations because the news stories were informed by their "socio-cultural context." Clark, *Women and Crime*, 2.

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Clark, *Women and Crime*, 52.

on to say that male criminals are rarely represented as alienated from humanity.[72] Before coming to conclusions about what this says about patriarchal attitudes towards women, we must first determine whether criminal men were represented differently. If they were not viewed differently from women, we may actually learn more about early modern conceptions of order and disorder than about the patriarchal submission of women.

It is clear from the 1624 statute that child murder by unwed mothers was an exceptional case under the law: these women were singled out for special prosecution if they concealed a pregnancy, birth, or the death of a child. Furthermore, the use of the word "lewd" indicates a moral component to the law which reflects the changing attitudes about morality that began late in the sixteenth century. The following chapters do not argue that the seventeenth-century justice system treated female child murderers the same as male child murderers. Rather, the focus is on the way in which these crimes were represented by pamphleteers and balladeers. If, as I argued earlier, pamphlets and broadsides reflected the popular mentality, we may see a disjunction between that and the ideals of parliament. Laura Gowing points out that while literature, the law, and the church prescribed a high level of morality which they attempted to make society conform to, there was, in reality, "a spectrum of flexible interpretations of moral rules and their meaning in relations between, and amongst, women and men"[73].

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72 Clark, *Women and Crime*, 54.

73 Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 3. In early modern Germany, there was a "highly organized attempt to make the entire population conform to a narrow moral code of behaviour . . . . The values of this code were Christian." Rublack, *Crimes of Women*, 7.

This thesis considers thirty-one accounts of child murder in pamphlets and ballads.[74] There are an additional four accounts of men murdering their pregnant lover which are excluded from this study.[75] Of the thirty-one accounts of child murder used here, nine are about men accused of murdering children. Two of these nine also involve women. There are twenty-two pamphlets about women who kill children, but several of these are different versions of the same story. Thus, there are eighteen different accounts of women who murdered children.

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This chapter focuses on the language used to describe child murderers. Before we can come to conclusions about the ways in which women were depicted, we need to study descriptions of both women and men and consider the importance of the similarities and differences within those descriptions.[76] The first pamphlet is the account of Mr. Lincolne who hires his lodger to murder three of his four children. Lincolne is a well-off widower courting a wealthy widow. However, he is worried she will not marry him because he has so many children. Seeing his hope of a secure future dissolving he hires a laborer to

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I have included accounts from the late sixteenth century through 1699. Attitudes towards illegitimacy and morality began to change early in this period. Previously, moral crimes, of which child murder was one, were handled through the ecclesiastical courts and did not reach criminal the legal system.

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According to Garthine Walker, attacks on pregnant women were "particularly heinous." *Crime*, 60. However, the men in these pamphlets were not convicted for murdering the unborn child, but the woman and so the accounts are not applicable to a study of child murder.

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Garthine Walker recognizes that there are few differences in the descriptions of male and female criminals, but she does not discuss the implications of this for our understanding of early modern society. Walker, "Demons," 125.

"make awai" with his children for forty shillings and one cow. In order to establish an alibi, he takes his oldest son to the market and purchases clothing for the younger children. While they are gone, the laborer hits the three younger children on the head with a hatchet, and cuts their throats.[77]

Lincolne sends his oldest son home first. When the boy cannot open the door, he waits for his father who does not enter the house, but immediately goes to a neighbour for help. When they find the bodies, the father does not show signs of grief, nor does he agree to pursue the killer, even though neighbours suspect the lodger whom they had seen around the house earlier. Instead, he blames his eldest son for the crime.[78] On the following day, Lincolne refuses to arrange for burial, or allow the coroner to see the bodies.[79] The children lie unburied for three days. When he is reproved by his neighbours, he buries the bodies in a shallow pit within the house, but springs flood the pit and wash the bodies clean. After eight days, the coroner finally sees the bodies, by

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Anon., *Sundrye Strange and Inhumaine Murthers, lately committed the first of a father that hired a man to kill three of his children neere to Ashford in Kent, the second of Master Page of Plymouth, murthered by the consent of his owne wife: with the strange discoverie of sundrye other murthers, wherein is described the odiousnesse of murther, with the vengeance which God inflicteth on murtherers*. Printed at London: by Thomas Scott, 1591. Unless otherwise noted, all seventeenth century references are from Early English Books Online. Although I have not translated any passages into modern English or corrected spelling or grammar, I have adjusted typographical variants to modern usage.

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Anon., *Sundrye Strange and Inhumaine Murthers*.

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The coroner's function in seventeenth-century England differed significantly from the role played by today's coroners. The coroner was responsible for investigating deaths deemed suspicious and convening a jury to assist him. He could call witnesses and suspects and imprison those suspected of murder. His reports were forwarded to the King's Bench and then to the assizes for trial. J.A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England 1550-1750* (London and New York: Longman, 1984), 33.

which time the lodger has been found. He denies his guilt, but is brought before the bodies which begin to bleed anew at his appearance. When the lodger calls their names, the bodies become flushed. The lodger confesses and implicates the father who does not confess until his execution.[80]

Two most unnaturall and bloodie Murthers contains the account of Mr. Caverley, who kills two of his children and a maid. Caverly, discontented with his life, squanders his wealth and goes into debt. He blames his wife for his predicament, but the pamphleteer tells us that his anger towards her is "without cause." In fact, his wife is "a curteous Gentlewoman" of "honourable Personage"[81]. In an effort to appease him, she hands over her jewels so that he can repay his debts. Family members also attempt to calm his behaviour, but his anger only grows, although he is able to hide it from them. Finally, he is confronted by the master of his brother's college. Caverly's brother had been committed to prison because he had acted as a guarantor of Caverly's debt. The master pleads with Caverly to pay the debt so that his brother can resume his life. Caverly takes the advice to heart and recognizes the ways in which he has wronged people.[82]

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Anon., *Sundrye Strange and Inhumaine Murthers.*

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Anon., *Two most unnaturall and bloodie Murthers the one by Maister Caverly, a Yorkeshire gentleman, practiced upon his wife, and committed uppon his two children, the three and twentie of April 1605. The other, by Mistris Browne, and her servant Peter, upon her husband, who were executed in Lent last past at Bury in Suffolke.1605* (Printed at London: By V. S[immes] for Nathanael Butter dwelling in Paules churchyard neere Saint Austens Gate, 1605), 3.

82

Anon., *Two most unnaturall and bloodie Murthers,* 5-11 passim.

While he contemplates his life, his young son enters the room and "look[s] prettily uppe to him saying, Howe doe you father: which lovely looke, and gently question of the childe raysed againe the remembraunce of the disstresse that hee should leave him in"[83]. In a violent rage, Caverly stabs the child with a dagger and takes him to the bedchamber where his sleeping wife, maid and second son are. He throws the maid, who dies from the fall, down the stairs. The noise of the fall brings the other servants to her aid. Upstairs, Caverly stabs the younger child even while the mother tries to protect it. In the process, she is badly wounded. As he tries to escape his father, the first child falls down the stairs and dies. This brings the servants running, but they are unable to stop Caverly who kills his second child before fleeing on horseback. Caverly is so bent on destruction that he rides towards the house where his youngest child is at nurse with the purpose of completing the murder of his children. However, as with so many other accounts of murder, God intervenes on behalf of his "reasonable creatures" and causes Caverly's horse to be his downfall. After he is caught, he is allowed to see his wife, who recovers from her wounds. Caverly is only sorry that he did not kill his third child to free it "from beggary"[84].

Finally, *Bloody News from Devonshire* is the account of another father who violently murders his children while in an angry rage. As with Caverly and Lincolne, this man is not poor. Lincolne is comfortable and fully able to support his household - he has enough

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[83] Anon., *Two most unnaturall and bloodie Murthers*, 13.

[84] Anon., *Two most unnaturall and bloodie Murthers*, 14-17 passim.

funds to pay a considerable amount for the murder of his children. Caverly and the father of this account are both wealthy men who had been well looked after by their families. However, the Devil causes fights between this couple so that they live with "jealousies and mistrusts." Neighbours try to reconcile the couple, but the husband is intransigent and grows more angry. One day he returns home in a full fury. His wife flees to a neighbour's for safety and his twelve-year-old son approaches him "with uplifted hands and tears, to intreat him to be pacified, and not to kill or beat his Mother"[85]. Rather than calming the man, the action serves to infuriate him even more and he splits the boy's head with an axe. He then finds his three daughters, the oldest of whom is not yet nine years old, and does the same to them, while they beg his mercy. He is immediately struck with remorse for murdering the "[c]hildren of his bowels" and tries to commit suicide, but neighbours stop him and he is taken to the justices.[86]

These three accounts have a number of things in common, particularly the language used to describe these men. The unnamed father in the third account is "inhuman"[87]. This word is also used in the account of Enoch ap Euan who murders his mother and

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85

Anon., *Bloody News from Devonshire being a true though lamentable relation of four barbarous and horrid murders, committed by an inhuman father upon the bodies of his son and three daughters, at a village near Combe in the county of Devon, on the 30th of March, 1694 . . .: also, the deplorable condition his wife is in, whom he pursued with an intent to murder: together with his confession before a justice of peace, and commitment to Exon jayl as it was communicated by a letter from an eminent dealer in Combe, to a worthy citizen in London* (London: printed, and are to be sold by Randal Taylor, 1694), 2.

86

Anon., *Bloody News from Devonshire*, 3.

87

There was no standardization in seventeenth-century spelling. Thus, inhuman is also spelled inhumane, but has the same meaning in this context.

brother, and John Rowse who drowns his children in a spring.[88] It occurs frequently in these accounts and is notable because it denotes something other than man. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the contemporary meaning also implied something uncivilized. Thus, murderous men stood outside of civilized human society. Another frequently used adjective is "barbarous." As with inhuman, it is used often and in a variety of circumstances. The word has several meanings: uncultured, uncivilized, savage, or not Christian. Thus, anybody described as barbarous would not be considered a part of civilized Christian society and so lived on the moral fringes of that society. Sandra Clark argues that male criminals are rarely represented as "alienated from humanity"[89] in pamphlet literature, but murder pamphlets do not support this claim.

The descriptor "monstrous" is also frequently found in seventeenth-century pamphlets

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88

Richard More, *A True Relation of a barbarous and most cruell murther [com]mitted by one Enoch ap Euan, who cut off his owne naturall mothers head, and his brothers. The cause wherefore he did this most excrable act: . . . with his condemnation and execution. With certain pregnant inducements, both divine and moral* (London: Printed by Nicholas Okes, 1633); John Taylor, *The Unnaturall Father, or, the cruell murther committed by [one] John Rowse of the towne of Ewell, ten m[iles] from London, in the county of Surry, upon two of his owne children with his prayer and repentance at the Sessions, and his execution for the said fact at Croydon, on Munday the second of July, 1621* (London: Printed for I.T. and H.G., 1621). See also J.C., *The Araignment of Hypocrisie, or, a looking-glasse for murderers and adulterers; and all others that profes religion, and make show of holiness, yet deny the power and practice thereof in their lives and conversations. Being a fearfull example of Gods judgements on Mr. Barker, minister of Gods word at Pytchley two miles from Ketterin in Northhamptonshire; who for living in adultery with his neer kinswoman, and concealing the murder of her infant, was with his kinswoman and maid-servant executed at Northampton. With the strange manner of the discovery of that horrid murder; and their several speeches immediately before their deaths* (Printed at London: by John Crowch and T.W., 1652) and Anon., "The Children's Cries Against Their Barbarous & Cruel Father, Being A Relation of a most inhumane Act committed by a Gravemaker of Marybone, upon his own children, by endeavouring to Drown them; and likewise a strange Boy, whom he flung in a Pond that is about two Fields from Marybone, on Monday the 25th. of May, 1696. and of his being siezed and sent to Prison," in Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., *The Pepys Ballads* 8 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 7:226-227.

89

Sandra Clark, *Women and Crime*, 54.

and is not restricted to women.[90] In her PhD dissertation, Kathryn Brammall considers the changes that occurred in the rhetoric of monstrosity between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Early writers viewed the physically monstrous as signs of God's disfavor. By the seventeenth century, a new type of monster was emerging. According to Brammall, "the determining factor in the process of monster identification was no longer invariably a physical and visible deformity; rather, an accusation of monstrosity frequently implied aberrant *inner* characteristics and affections"[91]. Thus, 'virtual' monsters were not visible to their community until they had committed an atrocious act. Enoch ap Euan was called monstrous for murdering his mother and brother and the murder of Lincolne's children is described as an act of "monstrous crueltie"[92]. Numerous pamphlets describe the character of people who lead good, moral lives. Their fall from grace is usually unexpected and inexplicable. Thus, when ap Euan murders his mother and brother, the pamphleteer comments on the suddenness of ap Euan's transformation. He had presented himself as a respectable member of society who was

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For a detailed discussion of the monstrous in early modern society, see Kathryn M. Brammall, "Discussions of Abnormality and Deformity in Early Modern England, With Particular Reference to the Notion of Monstrosity" (PhD diss., Dalhousie University, 1995); Kathryn Brammall, "Monstrous Metamorphosis: Nature, Morality, and the Rhetoric of Monstrosity in Tudor England," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27.1 (Spring 1996); Katherine Park and Lorraine J. Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France and England," *Past and Present* 92 (August 1981); and Dudley Wilson, *Signs and Portents: Monstrous Births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

91

Brammall, "Discussions of Abnormality", 129.

92

More, *A True Relation*; Anon., *Sundrye Strange and Inhumane Murders*. See also Anon., *Two Most Unaturall and Bloodie Murthers*.

"pure outwardly, howsoever corrupt inwardly"[93]. His corruption, or monstrosity, made itself manifest when he committed murder.

Another frequently used descriptor is "unnatural." One definition for unnatural is that which is "not in accordance or agreement with the usual course of nature"[94]. Reading seventeenth-century crime pamphlets highlights a concern with conforming to ideal standards. There was little room for difference and no room for immorality in either men or women. Thus, to be described as unnatural meant that a person did not conform and was different from the rest of society. As a person who did not comply with civilized ideals, the "unnatural" father was not an accepted member of society. Of the nine pamphlets in which a man is involved in the murder of a child, five call either the act or the man himself unnatural. Much has been made of the importance of women acting in a wifely and motherly fashion in this literature. However, men were expected to do the same. The account of the father from Devonshire who murders his four children praises the couple in the beginning of the story for being "happy and comfortable" and giving their children "[c]are and good [e]ducation"[95]. This is a family who lives in accordance with Christian ideals and where the husband cares for and protects his family. However,

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93 More, *A True Relation*, 11.

94 *Oxford English Dictionary*.

95 Anon., *Bloody News from Devonshire*, 1.

he cannot maintain the ideal and resorts to murder.[96] There is clearly an expectation that men had a duty to protect their families and some men found it to be too heavy a burden.[97] This becomes apparent when we consider that seven of these pamphlets are about men who murder family members - except Enoch ap Euan, who kills his mother and brother, these pamphlets are about fathers who kill their children. The two pamphlets where family members were not involved use few descriptors which denote "otherness"[98]. The account of a grandmother who murders her grandchild explicitly states the expectations of family members: "he is worse than an Infidel, that looks not after his own

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96

Numerous examples can be found of pamphleteers exhorting men to follow their duty. When Ro Sherburne murders his wife, the author of the pamphlet tells his readers that it was particularly bad because the murder was "aggravated with Design and Premeditation . . . against so near a Relation . . . whom, both the Laws of God and man, the Dictates of Reason, and a man's own Solemn Vows, *had in a special manner oblig'd him to Defend, Love, and Cherish* . . . [this murder] swells beyond all Proportion of Ordinary Impiety, and grows monstrously Destestable." Anon., *The Bloody Papist, or, A true relation of the horrid and barbarous murder committed by one Ro Sherburne of Kyme in Lincolnshire (a notorious papist) upon his wife whom in an inhumane manner he murder'd in her bed, for which he is now a prisoner in Lincol-Gaol* (London: Printed by George Larkin, 1683), 1 - italics mine. Thus, husbands had an obligation sworn before God and man to look after their families. Marilyn Francus argues that "[r]estoration society did not want to recognize what . . . all infanticidal mothers, represented: that maternity was difficult, and mothers required support in order to succeed . . . and the perpetual deferral of maternal satisfaction, led to the destruction of the family." Arguably, the pamphlets which indicate that fathers who killed their children due to the pressures of their lives indicate that mothers were not the only members of society who needed a support network. Francus, "Monstrous Mothers", 141.

97

Garthine Walker points out that the failure of husbands to provide for their families was stressed in stories told in secular and ecclesiastical courts. Walker, *Crime*, 65.

98

The one exception is the account of two strangers who killed a boy and maimed his sister in order to rob them which is described as monstrous. While numerous negative adjectives are used in these two accounts, this is the only occurrence of a word which denotes otherness. Anon., *The Horrible Murther of a young boy of three yeres of age, whose sister had her tongue cut out and how it pleased God to reveale the offendors, by giving speech to the tongules childe. Which offendors were executed at Hartford the 4. of August. 1606* (London: Printed by E. Allde for William Firebrand, and are to be solde at his shop in the Popes-head alley, over against the taverne door, 1606).

Family"[99]. Murder within the family was a particularly egregious sin and stood outside the natural order.[100] According to Ulinka Rublack, "the destruction of family from inside" was socially harmful. Harshly prosecuting child murder highlighted the unnatural nature of the act and served as a contrast to the unending love a mother should have for her child.[101]

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When considering accounts of women who committed child murder, the circumstances in which the murders took place, as described in the literature, and the motives behind them are critical. Additionally, the similarities and differences in the ways in which murderous women and men were described will be highlighted. There are twenty-two pamphlets or broadsides about women who committed child murder. Scholars have argued that the higher number of pamphlets about female murderers as opposed to accounts of men who committed the same crime indicates an "obsession" with female criminals, but this is too simplistic an explanation. It is evident that the fear of female disorder drove many pamphleteers to speak against them. However, female disorder was not their only concern. According to Garthine Walker, the fact that there are

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Anon., *The Unnatural Grand Mother, or, A true relation of a most barbarous murther committed by Elizabeth Hazard . . . on her grand childe, of about two years old by drowning it in a tub of water, on Friday the 15 of July, 1659 together with the manner of her apprehending, and examination before my Lord Mayor, likewise the sending her to Newgate where she now remains in a sad condition* (London: Printed for Thomas Higgins, 1659), 5.

100

According to Brammall, "an indefensible action became monstrous and deformed when the killer disregarded his or her "natural" family allegiances." Brammall, "Discussions of Abnormality," 223.

101

Rublack, *The Crimes of Women*, 169.

fewer accounts of wife murder than husband murder does not mean that there was a double standard, but that seventeenth-century England had different understandings of violence and order.[102] Her point is well taken and highlights the ways in which scholars can become anachronistic by using modern ideas about such things as patriarchy and misogyny to study the past and then to judge past cultures with these ideas.

The author of *Sundrye Stange and Inhumane Murthers* includes several accounts of murder in his pamphlet. I have already discussed Mr. Lincolne, who hired a lodger to murder his children. This is a rare opportunity to compare directly how a single author represents men and women accused of the same crime because the pamphlet also includes the account of Alice Shepheard, a single mother who finds herself pregnant. Alice, unlike many women in these pamphlets, does not keep her pregnancy secret, but tells her mother and grandmother. When the time to give birth arrives, they send for a midwife. After Shepheard gives birth, the midwife leaves and the three women decide to kill the child because Shepheard is unmarried. They break his neck and bury him in the churchyard. A dog soon digs the body up and justices are brought in. The three women claim that the child was still-born and the midwife backs them up. However, because God performs miracles and cannot let murderers go free, he causes the midwife's conscience to bother her so that she confesses that the child was born alive. All three later confessed and were executed.[103]

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102 Walker, "Demons in Female Form," 131.

103 Anon., *Sundrye Strange and Inhumaine Murthers*. This account is from 1591. As it is prior to the 1624 Act, concealment itself was not enough to convict these women of murder. Only direct

The accounts of Mr. Lincolne and Alice Shepheard are treated very differently. The story of Mr. Lincolne is given over three pages of text, while Alice Shepheard's story is told in under two. We learn a great deal about Mr. Lincolne's background, while we only learn that Sheapheard is a poor young "[d]amsel" living in Salisburie. Mr. Lincolne is described as monstrous, cruel, unnatural, wicked, and odious. He is a "harde hearted father" and a "wretched man"[104]. His greed leads him to commit a most vile act. Alice Shepheard on the other hand, is referred to as an unnatural mother and a "strumpet." The murder of her child is "wilfull" and "greevous." The most obvious similarity here is the reference to both parents as unnatural. Sandra Clark says that violence by women is "deeply unnatural"[105]. Yet, child murder pamphlets do not imply that similar violence by men was natural. Rather, these criminals did not conform to moral or legal standards and committed a murder which most people would find very difficult to understand[106]. Mr. Lincolne's hard-heartedness indicates that he had no natural love for his children as does the murder of Shepheard's infant. The differences between the two cases are interesting. First, Lincolne murders out of greed, Shepheard out of poverty and an inability to maintain her child. Second, Lincolne's act is depicted as more grievous. The negative

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evidence, such as a confession, would allow the court to execute them.

104 The specific reference to Lincolne as a "harde hearted father" indicates that a father was also expected to love his children. Parental love was not an emotion reserved for women.

105 Clark, *Women and Crime*, 53.

106 Sandra Clark says child murderers are called monstrous because their behavior is so inexplicable that they can only be understood as monsters. Clark, *Women and Crime*, 38.

adjectives used to describe him are stronger than those used for Shepheard and we are told more about his story. Finally, one of the biggest differences is the moral component which is introduced while discussing Alice Shepheard. She is a "strumpet" who has a child out of wedlock. We find this type of negative sexual connotation in one other account of a woman who murdered her child. Martha Scambler is a "graceles wanton" and a "strumpet"[107]. Like Shepheard, Scambler is an unmarried women who becomes pregnant. Sexual immorality, according to seventeenth-century standards, was apparent by her pregnancy. According to Susan Staub, women were "invariably" described as whores. Being called a whore did necessarily mean that a woman was a prostitute; she could simply be any woman who did not fit the ideal of a virtuous wife. Thus, single women who became pregnant were more dangerous because they were placed "in counterdistinction to the good, married mother"[108]. However, I have found very few uses of the word whore in these pamphlets, and few cases of pamphleteers discussing a woman's sexual immorality.[109] In this pamphlet, Lincolne, a widower, was not sexually

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107

Anon., *Deeds Against Nature and Monsters by Kinde tryed at the gaole deliverie of Newgate, at the sessions in the Old Bayly, the 18. and 19. Of July last, 1614. the one of a London cripple named John Arthur, that to hide his shame and lust, strangled his betrothed wife. The other of a lascivious young damsell named Martha Scambler, which made away the fru[i]t of her own womb, that the world might not see the seed of her own shame: which two persons with divers others were executed at Tyburne the 21. o[f] July following. With two sorrowful ditties of these two aforesaid persons, made by themselves in Newgate, the night before their execution* (At London: Printed [by G. Eld] for Edward Wright, 1614).

108

Staub, *Stepdames*, 68.

109

Susan Staub, after stating that women are "invariably described as whores," agrees that most pamphlets about married mothers do not use sexually charged language against them. Staub, *Stepdames*, 47. Since the majority of these pamphlets do not discuss unmarried mothers, Staub's earlier statement must be reexamined. I have also studied approximately seventy pamphlets which

immoral because he had his children during his marriage. Thus, we cannot infer from the use of the word strumpet that the author is more aggrieved by women who commit child murder than men who did so. Nor can we assume that pamphleteers were not concerned with male immorality. In fact, the story about Mr. Barker, who is executed for concealing the death of his bastard child, clearly accuses Barker of immorality.

Barker, a married minister, is given the guardianship of a female relative. He betrays the trust, and gets the girl pregnant. In order to hide his "sin and shame" he gives the expecting girl abortifacients which do not work. After the birth, the mother and a maid murder the child and Barker buries it in the orchard. It is later discovered and the crime comes to light. Barker is convicted of concealment, but never confesses. However, he does confess to "wanton words, thoughts, and actions" and to living a "lustful filthy unclean life"[110]. Sexual immorality was not restricted to women, and pamphleteers did not ignore it in men. All members of society were expected to uphold the sexual ideals embedded within their laws and mores.[111]

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deal with murder other than child murder. Of the thirty-two about female murderers, only three use similar language, and none use the word whore.

110

J.C., *The Araignment of Hypocrisie*. This is the only case in the pamphlets in which a man was convicted of concealment. I have been unable to determine if this was done under the 1624 Statute, although I doubt this to be the case because the law specifically applied to single women. Interestingly, after his execution, the two women who accused him recant and admit that he had nothing to do with the murder or concealment.

111

There are several accounts of men who committed murder of adults whose lives of immorality led to the crime. The chain of lesser sins leading to murder is a commonplace: "Sloth is linked with Drunkennes, Drunkennes with Fornication and Adultery, & Adultery with Murder." See John Taylor, *The Unnaturall Father*. For examples of men's immoral lives leading to murder see: Anon., *The Bloody Husband and Cruell Neighbour. Or, a true historie of two murthers, lately committed in Laurence Parish, in the Isle of Thanet in Knet, neer Sandwich: one murther by the hands of Adam*

This is not the only account of female child murder which uses adjectives that define these women as "other." As with the accounts of men, several descriptors are used. A widow who murders her ill child is "contrary to nature and grace." The author claims to understand the woman's plight: she is forced to maintain herself and her child and succeeds because she "work[s] her fingers to the bone"[112]. Her child, who is ill, cries continuously but she "b[ears] up under it as well as could be expected for a weak Vessel," although she becomes exhausted. Most of her money is spent on doctors and remedies for her child, but nothing works. In her exhaustion, she is more susceptible to trickery and eventually succumbs to the Devil's voice telling her that her child is the cause of her problems and she murders it. Nobody suspects that the child was murdered and she escapes justice for thirty years, during which time she remarries and has another son.

Sprackling Esquire, who upon the 12th day of December last, being Sabbath day; in the morning, cut, mangled, and murthered his own wife; for which fact he was hanged at Sandwich upon Wednesday the 27th day of April last, 1653. The other the murther of Richard Langly, of the same parish, whose blood also (as is here shewed) cryed against the said Mr. Sprackling, written by one that lives neer the place where the said murthers were committed, and was present at Mr. Sprackling's tryall; and published for the warning, and good of all. May 13. 1653. Imprimatur, Edm. Calamy (London: Printed by Tho. Warren, 1653); Anon., *The Downfal of William Grismond: or, A lamentable murther by him committed at Lainterdine, in the county of Hereford, the 12 of March, 1650 with his woful lamentation. The tune is, Where is my love* ([London]: Printed for F. Coles, T. Vere, and I. Wright, [1674]); and Francis Nicholson, *The True Narrative of the Confession and Execution of Francis Nicholson who was executed this present Wednesday, being the 27th of this instant October, 1680. And hang'd up in chains at Hownslow-Heath, for murthering of one John Dimbleby at Hampton-Court this being his own true confession both to the Ordinary of Newgate, and several other ministers and others who came to him whilst he continued in prison, and have hereunto subscribed their names to attest the truth of this relation* ([London: printed by D. Mallet, 1680]).

112

Anon., *Murther will out; or A true and faithful relation of a horrible murther commited thirty three years ago, by an unnatural mother, upon the body of her own child about a year old, and was never discovered till this 24th of November 1675. by her own self, upon the fears of an approaching death: for which crime she was taken from her bed, and carried in a coach to prison, where she remains very penitent. With an account from her own mouth how she was tempted to commit this murder by the devil: As also how she finished it. The truth of this you may be satisfied with at Newgate* ([London]: Printed for C. Passinger, [1675?]), 1-2.

Eventually she contracts a fever which appears as if it will be fatal. On her sickbed she confesses to the murder and is sentenced to hang.[113]

No Natural Mother is the story of a single mother who becomes pregnant. She was brought up well, and eventually takes the position of servant and lives honestly. However, her "unbridled will" gets the better of her and she becomes pregnant. The father flees and she is left to hide her "fault." She gives birth in secret and smothers the child by hiding it under straw. She is confronted by her mistress and shows the women the child's body after which she is arrested and sentenced to hang.[114]

Margaret Vincent, a married woman, strangles two of her children. Vincent is well loved by her husband and has a good life. She is "much esteemed" for her "modest and seemely carriage" until the Devil intervenes and seduces her into converting to Catholicism. She tries in vain to convert her husband and, when she fails, decides to free her children from the dangers of their father's religion. On a day when she knows the townspeople will be busy in the town square, she remains at home with two of her children. She strangles both of them and then becomes infuriated because the third child is at nurse and she cannot kill it also. She tries to strangle herself, but fails and so then tries to drown herself. Before she can succeed, a maid returns and calls for help. Vincent

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113

Anon., *Murther will out*, 3-6 passim.

114

M. P[arker], "No Naturall Mother, but a Monster. Or, the exact relation of one, whom for making away her owne new borne childe, about Brainford neere London, was hang'd at Teyborne, on Wednesday the 11. of December, 1633," in Hyder E. Rollins, ed., *A Pepysian Garland: Black-Letter Broadside Ballads of the Years 1595-1639 Chiefly from the Collection of Samuel Pepys* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

remains obstinate in denying the Protestant faith and does not repent. She believes that she has done the right thing by saving her children from eternal damnation. Eventually, with the help of the town constable, she comes to realize that she is wrong and that Protestantism is the true faith.[115]

This is one of the pamphlets about women who commit child murder in which a considerable amount of space is devoted to highlighting the weakness of women's nature. Vincent is a gentlewoman who "may well serve for a cleare looking Glasse to see a womans weaknes in, how soone and apt she is wonne unto wickedness, not onely to the bodies overthrow, but the soules danger." According to the author, it is not surprising that Vincent succumbed to the Devil's enticements because "[Papists] have such charming perswasions that hardly the female kinde can escape their inticements"[116]. As with male child murderers, invective against women is not common in these pamphlets until the murder has been committed. Vincent herself is initially described as a woman who is "much esteemed" for her "modest and seemely carriage" until the murder "blemishe[s] the glory" of her children.[117]. Arguably, the negative language used in this

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115

Anon., *A pittilesse Mother That most unnaturally at one time, murthered two of her owne children at Acton within sixe miles from London uppon holy thursday last 1616. The ninth of May. Being a gentlewoman named Margret Vincent, wife of Mr. Jariuis Vincent, of the same towne. With her examination, confession and true discovery of all the proceedings in the said bloody accident. Whereunto is added Andersons repentance, who was executed at Tiburne the 18. of May being Whitson Eve 1[161]. Written in the time of his prisonment in Newgate* ([London: Printed [by G. Eld] for J. Trundle, and sold by J. Wright, [1616]]).

116

Anon., *A pittilesse Mother*.

117

Anon., *A pittilesse Mother*.

pamphlet is primarily a result of Vincent's conversion to Catholicism and the murder of her child, rather than the fact that she is a woman. It reflects the fear Protestants felt about the disorder that could be caused by other religions which refused to conform to the Protestant faith. One pamphleteer makes this connection clear: "It is worthy your especiall remarke, especially in these times, where there are so many *Sectists, Familists, Separatists, Non-conformists,* and *Innovators* in Religion, which how dangerous they are, and what mischiefe they may after breed"[118].

Like fathers who kill their children, these mothers are referred to as unnatural, barbarous, inhuman, and monstrous. There is one significant difference between the ways women and men are described in these pamphlets. Of the nineteen pamphlets, five of them refer to the women as animals. Marilyn Francus argues that bestiality in humans implies the lack of a soul.[119] In studying pamphlets about women who are described as animals, this implies that women were perceived as soulless, and, thus, incapable of receiving eternal salvation. When Elizabeth Barnes murders her daughter, the author highlights the differences between the victim and perpetrator: "[t]he innocent Lambe and ravenous Wolfe both spend out the day together"[120]. In Anne Musket's confession, she

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118 More, *A True Relation*, 4.

119 Marilyn Francus, *Monstrous Mothers*, 137.

120 Henry Goodcole, *Nature's Cruel Step-dames: or, Matchlesse monsters of the female sex; Elizabeth Barnes, and Anne Willis Who were executed the 26. day of April, 1637. at Tyburne, for the unnaturall murthering of their owne children. Also, herein is contained their severall confessions, and the courts just proceedings against other notorious malefactors, with their severall offences this sessions. Further, a relation of the wicked life and impenitent death of John Flood, who raped his owne childe.* (Printed at London: [By E. Purslowe] for Francis Coules, dwelling in the Old-Baily, 1637), 2. The

says that she is "worse than any savage Beare, She Wolfe, or Tygresse"[121]. When Margaret Vincent decides to kill her children "she purposed to become a Tygerous Mother and so wolvishly to commit the murther of her owne flesh and blood"[122]. This language is not used in the pamphlets about men who kill their children, though it is found in pamphlets about men who kill adults. In *Murder upon Murder*, the killers, a man and a woman, are likened to "ravening wolves" who watch until they can catch their "innocent" prey. Similarly, when three servants kill their master while he is sleeping, they are described as "brutish beasts"[123]. Adam Sprackling is described as a "bloudy Oxe"for killing his wife.[124] However, references to women who are unable to protect their young even though animals in the wild do, are more common than similar

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innocence of the victim is common in murder pamphlets.

121 Anne Musket, *The much-afflicted Mothers Teares, for her drowned Daughter/ [by?] Anne Musket, the wofull mother for her lost daughter* (Printed at London: for John Trundle, [1624]).

122 Anon., *A pittilesse Mother*.

123 Anon., *Murder upon Murder committed by Thomas Sherwood, alias, Countrey Tom: and Elizabeth Evans, alias Canbrye Besse: the first upon M. Loe, the 2. of M. George Holt of Windzor, whom inhumanely they kild neare Islington on the 22. day of January 1635. The last upon M. Thomas Claxton of London,whom mercilessly they murdered upon the second day of April last past, neare unto Lambs Conduit on the backside of Holborne, with many other robberies and mischiefs by them committed from time to time since Midsomer last past, now revealed and Confest by them, and now according to judgement he is hang'd neare to Lambs Conduit this 14 of April, 1635. to the terror of all such offenders. To the tune of Brangandary downe, & c.* (Printed at London: For T. Langley, and are to be sold by Thomas Lambert in Smithfield, neare to the hospitall gate [1635]); I.T., *A Horrible Creuel and Bloody Murther committed at Putnam in Surrey on the 21. of Aprill last, 1614, being thursday, upon the body of Edward Hall a miller of the same parish, done by the hands of John Selling, Peeter Pet and Edward Streater, his servants to the said Hall, each of them giving him a deadly blow (as he lay sleeping) with a pickax. Published by authority.* (Imprinted at London: [By G. Eld] for John Wright, and are to be sold without Newgate at the signe of the Bible, 1614).

124 Anon., *The Bloody Husband*, 7.

descriptors of men.[125] There is an interesting metaphor used for men that I have not yet found for women. Men are likened to storms which are also soulless. As Caverly prepares to murder his oldest child he is described as the sea, "beeing hurled into hideous billowes, by the fury of the winde, hideth both heaven and earth from the eye of man"[126]. Like animals, a storm tossed sea cannot be controlled by man: the danger to seventeenth-century society is clear and must be addressed. According to Ulinka Rublack, the blurring of the line between human and bestial further marginalized the crime of child murder.[127] Arguably, the same is true of the blurring of the line between human and natural forces.

Scholars who claim that the seventeenth-century perceived women as "other" use pamphlets which specifically refer to them as unwomanly. However, as will be discussed below, the idea of women as "other" must be revisited in light of the sources. Martha Scambler, "fearing the disgrace of the world," attempts to abort her pregnancy, but fails. She gives birth in secret to a boy and, "not like a mother, but a monster thr[ows] it downe into a lothsome privy house" where the child dies. She would not have been discovered,

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125 Kathryn Brammall points out that men who beat their wives were referred to as more "savage & barbarous" than animals. Brammall, "Discussions of Abnormality", 217.

126 Anon. *Two most Unaturall and Bloodie Murthers*, 13.

127 Rublack, *Crimes of Women*, 172. For a discussion of the separation of man and animals, see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (London: Allen Lane, 1983). According to Thomas, the seventeenth century witnessed a theological discussion about whether animals had souls that was based, in part, on the British acceptance of animals as pets. By the Victorian period, many thought that animals had the same facilities as humans, but to a different degree.

but a young neighbour throws a dog into the privy as a prank. The dog's barking brings other neighbours who remove the dog from the privy three days later, and find Scambler's infant. Women are gathered to search for the mother and Scambler is found out and later sentenced to death by the justices.[128] The author says that he cannot call murderous mothers women "because a woman esteemes the fruit of her owne womb, the pretious and dearest Jewell of the world"[129]. Notice that he does not say that mothers in general are unwomanly, only murderous mothers.

When Elizabeth Hazard murders her grandchild, she is represented as unnatural because "in stead of nourishing, and cherishing that which come at first from her own Loines, she so unwoman like and unnaturally hath now destroyed"[130]. Martha Scambler and Elizabeth Hazard are not "other" because they are women, but because they are women who have murdered their children. Of the twenty-two pamphlets about women who kill children, nine of them refer to the women as unnatural. All but one of these is a family member who has committed the murder. Notice that the author of the Scambler story says that women love their children and protect them as something precious. Hazard has murdered her own grandchild, whom she should have nourished and

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128

Laura Gowing presents a discussion on the dynamics of the search of women's bodies for signs of pregnancy or birth in "Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England," *Past and Present* 156 (August 1997).

129

Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*.

130

Anon., *The Unnatural Grand Mother*, 5. Murderers themselves were considered unnatural, or not of the human order. Thus, Hazard is unnatural because she commits an unnatural act, not because she is a woman.

cherished. Yet the account of John Rowse, who murders his two daughters, calls him "unfatherly" for drowning his children. As with Scambler and Hazard, Rowse is "other" than a parent because he has murdered his children.[131] The terms unwomanly or unmotherly do not necessarily indicate that women as a group were seen as something other than human. When discussing infanticide in early modern Germany, Ulinka Rublack points out that child murderers were prosecuted in order to "naturalize" a mother's love for her child. Furthermore, an effort was made to divide the uncivilized from the civilized.[132] Thus, it was anticipated that women would protect and love their children, not murder them. Although Rublack is discussing actual prosecutions in Germany, her point is also applicable to the pamphlet and broadside accounts of women who committed child murder in England. Furthermore, accounts of men who commit murder of both their wives and children indicate that men were also expected to provide love and nourishment to their families. By calling John Rowse "unfatherly," the author clearly situates him on the uncivilized side of society and indicates that his actions do not

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131

Contemporaries saw crimes within the family as especially egregious because the family was the base upon which political society was built. Brammall, "Discussions of Abnormality", 212. In 1598 Robert Cleaver stated that the family is a "small commonwealth" and that a man who could rule his home with peace and harmony would be worthy to rule a commonwealth. Robert Cleaver, *A Godlie forme of household government: for the ordering of private families, according to the direction of Gods word. Whereunto is adioyned in a more particular manner, the severall duties of the husband towards his wife: and the wifes dutie towards her husband. The parents dutie towards their children: and the childrens towards their parents. The masters dutie towards his servants: and also the servants dutie towards their masters.* (Gathered by R.C., Imprinted at London : By Thomas Creede, for Thomas Man, dwelling in Pater-Noster Rowe, at the signe of the Talbot, 1598). Both fathers and mothers were expected to provide physically and spiritually for their children and cause them no harm.

132

Rublack, *The Crimes of Women*, 167.

constitute normality.[133] Thus, early-modern society viewed a father's love as natural. The pamphlet *Bloody News from Devonshire*, says that the father's children were "of his bowels"[134]. Here this author makes the physical connection between a father and his children in a similar manner to those who call children the fruit of their mother's womb. Thus, a father's love was considered natural.[135] Sandra Clark states that "the woman who committed an act defined as criminal was doubly deviant, infringing the norms of gender and of social order"[136]. Yet, the sources indicate that this statement could also be applied to men who committed child murder.

It is important for scholars to compare the language used to describe *both* male and female child murderers before coming to conclusions about what the rhetorical constructions used in these pamphlets tell us about seventeenth-century conceptions of gender. As illustrated in this chapter, few of the words used to denote "otherness" in women were not also used to described male child murderers. We cannot, therefore, assume that using words such as monstrous, unnatural, and inhuman single women out as different from men. Nor do these words imply a misogynist attitude towards women.

133

Rublack goes on to say that "the destruction of the family from inside" was seen as socially destructive. Harshly prosecuting infanticide highlighted the unnatural nature of the act and served as a contrast to the unending love a mother should have for her child. Yet, the pamphlets considered for this thesis clearly indicate that a father was expected to protect his children in the same way as a mother. Rublack, *The Crimes of Women*, 169.

134

Anon., *Bloody News from Devonshire*, 3.

135

When Caverly attacks his first child in a rage, "all naturall love was forgot." Anon., *Two Most Unnatural and Bloody Murthers*, 13.

136

Clark, *Women and Crime*, ix.

Certainly, the special nature of the 1624 Act singled women out for prosecution because it was directed at those who bore bastard children and did not require proof of murder. However, as we can see, pamphleteers and balladeers did not necessarily agree that young, single women were a special problem. Rather, the social problem that concerned these authors appears to have been *all* murderous men and women and the social disorder that they could potentially cause with their familial disorder.

The language used in these pamphlets indicate that it was necessary for women to love and nurture their children in order to be acceptable mothers. However, the same was true of men, and hard-hearted fathers received no more acceptance than women who did not display the love that was considered natural of all parents. Additionally, sexually charged language was used against women in the pamphlets, but it is rare. It is possible that pamphleteers did not see unwed mothers as a serious threat, even though the 1624 statute implied that they were detrimental to society. Furthermore, accounts of male immorality are also present in these sources and indicate that immorality was unacceptable in both men and women.

Contrary to some scholarship, these pamphlets do not situate women as existing outside of the social order, nor do they say that women are "other" from men. Rather it is those who kill their children who are marginalized because of their unnatural behaviour. Thus, *anyone* who kills a child, whether they be male or female, is a is a liminal person, an inhuman monster who did not belong in Christian society. Women in these pamphlets were not "other" because of their gender, but because of the act they committed. Hence, their "otherness" is not in their differences to men, but in the difference from the rest of

society. Similarly, men who committed child murder were "other" in the same way.

Chapter Three
Agency: Man, God, and the Devil

The appearance of the Devil in murder pamphlets is a common rhetorical device that requires further investigation. Sandra Clark contends that the use of the Devil in accounts of women who commit murder indicate that female agency has been removed and placed in the hands of Satan.[137] In Susan Staub's opinion, all of the women in murder pamphlets are "easily" influenced by the Devil.[138] Garthine Walker, however, argues that pamphlets which introduce Satan do not imply that women are inherently bad, only that they succumb to a truly evil force.[139] In order to understand the role of the Devil in child murder pamphlets, we need to look at a number of instances where it is used. This will allow an analysis of why the Devil was often present in murder pamphlets and the ways in which this informed the agency of child murderers.

The concept of female agency has been used by scholars in order to demonstrate the ways in which women negotiated the restrictions of seventeenth-century patriarchy. In the case of child murder pamphlets, scholars claim that the appearance of the Devil in these pamphlets serves to remove a woman's agency. However, caution needs to be exercised on two fronts. Firstly, the term agency was not used in this context in the seventeenth century. Thus, we must be careful in using the modern meaning of the word

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137 Clark, *Women and Crime*, 55.

138 Staub, *Stepdames*, 13.

139 Walker, "Demons," 133.

when discussing this period. Secondly, many of these scholars have neglected to discuss masculine agency and have not attempted to understand if, at times, men were affected in much the same way as women. This chapter does not argue that pamphlet authors attempted to either ascribe agency to child murderers, or to remove it from the disruptive early modern man or woman. Rather, it discusses the concept of agency in response to other scholarship and highlights the need to integrate the study of men and women.

The story of Enoch ap Euan conflates the dangers of false religion with the influence of the Devil. Ap Euan is a special case in these pamphlets because he commits both fratricide and parricide which is "most execrable and abominable"[140]. The pamphlet is, in part, a confession purportedly written by ap Euan while in prison awaiting trial. In the confession, he claims that he had been "tuter'd by the Devill" into cutting off the head of his brother and then doing the same to his mother. He was more easily influenced because of false ideas about religion.[141] The author of the pamphlet then goes on to give ap Euan's background. The man did not have a bad reputation and conducted himself well. He regularly went to Church and did not show any outward signs of his inner corruption. At his hanging he implores the spectators to remember to be strong in their religion and to "apply themselves unto new conformity in opinions"[142].

Another pamphlet which attributes child murder to the Devil is the account of John

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140 More, *A True Relation of a most barbarous and cruell Murther*, 5.

141 More, *A True Relation of a most barbarous and cruell Murther*, 6-7.

142 More, *A True Relation of a most barbarous and cruell Murther*, 9-10 passim.

Rowse. Rowse is a well-off fishmonger who gives up his occupation to live off his land where he leads a good life and is well respected by the other villagers. He eventually marries an "honest" woman. However, after just six months, the Devil sends a maidservant to their house in order to disrupt their marriage. Rowse begins an affair with her, and after two years his wife dies of a broken heart. He does not enjoy life as a widower and so takes a second wife. However, Rowse does not change his ways and their marriage is unhappy because "by his dayly Ryot, excessive drinking, & unproportionable spending, his estate beg[ins] to be much impoverished" and his neighbours reject him.[143] He abandons his wife and two children and takes the maid to London where he takes up company with unsavory people who swindle him out of what is left of his estate. He leaves England in order to avoid his creditors and spends time in both Ireland and Holland. After some time he begins to rue his behavior towards his wife and children, but does not return to them until he has no other place left to go. He is welcomed home by his family.[144]

Again, the Devil influences Rowse by causing him to remember the comfort of his past life and to compare that to his present state of poverty. Like Caverly, Rowse begins to contemplate the future that his children will have now that his estate and land are gone. Each day he grows more despondent until, "by the Divels instigation and assistance" he plans how to free his daughters from "languishing" poverty. Susan Staub points out that several pamphlets about women who commit child murder refer to their motives which

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143 Taylor, *The Unnaturall Father*.

144 Taylor, *The Unnaturall Father*.

often involved poverty or religious differences between husband and wife. Yet, we have examples in these pamphlets where the authors attribute the same motives to men who commit child murder. In order to prevent anybody from witnessing his "devillish" undertaking, Rowse sends his wife to London on an errand. Rowse and his "ghostly Counsellor" take his youngest daughter from her bed and carry her to a spring in the cellar where he drowns her. He then takes her body up a few stairs and lays her on the floor before going to get his other daughter and doing the same to her. He covers the bodies with a sheet and then wanders his house crying until his wife comes home and he tells her where her daughters are. He is so remorseful that he does not even try to flee.[145]

The author explains that the crime probably happened because the town did not have either a preacher or a pastor. Thus, it was much easier for the Devil to take advantage of a man who "was so badly guarded, & so weakly guided." In such a state, Rowse would be unable to withstand Satan. According to the author, all of Rowse's actions can be attributed to the influence of the Devil.[146] Mary Cook, who murders one of her eight children, had suffered from "melancholy" for some time before she committed the crime. She had tried to commit suicide numerous times, and expressed discontent with her life to her husband who took no notice of her desperation. After the murder, her neighbours and family took notice, but the author of the pamphlet says that their intervention should have come sooner. The author chastises her husband and neighbours for not tending to Mary Cook's obvious needs prior to the murder and indicates that

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Taylor, *The Unnaturall Father*.

146
Taylor, *The Unnaturall Father*.

Satan's strength is too much for anyone to defeat without support from the community.[147]

There is also the account of the man who hired his lodger to murder his children so that he could have more opportunities to marry a wealthy woman. I have already described the events as related by the pamphlet author. This account is interesting because there is no mention of the devil as a motive for committing child murder. However, the wood block on the front page is significant, especially the prominence of the figure on the left side (Image 1). While having the appearance and dress of a man, the figure is clearly not human as it has clawed hands and feet. This devil is overtly influencing the murder of the children.[148]

Finally, there is the account I discussed in chapter two of a father from Devonshire who kills his four children out of anger. When he confesses, he claims that "[t]he Devil had tempted him to Murther his family, and at that time he could not resist the temptation"[149]. In each of these accounts, the connection between the Devil and murder is made explicit. Enoch ap Euan is "tuter'd" by the Devil, John Rowse kills at the Devil's

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N. Partridge, *Blood for blood, or, Justice executed for innocent blood-shed being a true narrative of that late horrid murder committed by Mary Cook upon her own and only beloved child, with several remarkable passages preceding the fact, as also what was most worthy observation during her imprisonment, and at her execution / faithfully communicated for publique satisfaction by N. Partridge and J. Sharp ; with a sermon on the same occasion ; with other spectaters and visiters whilst in prison and at her execution* (London : Printed for F. Smith ... and D. Newman ..., 1670).

148

Anon., *Sundrye Strange and Inhumaine Murthers*. It cannot be assumed that this woodcut was originally created for this document. The same image is used on the cover of the account of Caverly, and was later incorporated into this document by either the publisher or author. Nevertheless, its inclusion is important because it is a visual representation which would be seen and understood by even the illiterate. Thus, the image itself would reach more people and clearly conveys the message that succumbing to the Devil can lead to horrific acts.

149

Anon., *Bloody News from Devonshire*, 3.

instigation, and the father from Devonshire is "tempted" by the Devil. These men do not withstand the influence of Satan and each succumbs quickly. They do not commit murder on their own accord, but because they are under the influence of an evil force. Yet, as discussed in the previous chapter, they are "inhuman" and "unnatural" because they murder children.

Image 1. *Sundrye Strange and Inhumane Murthers, lately committed*

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In considering if these accounts differ from accounts of women who commit child murder, we need to compare the two closely. Elizabeth Barnes, whose story is told in

Nature's Cruel Step-Dames, is a young widow who has spent her estate on a man who had professed his love for her and she finds herself destitute and pregnant. Unsure of what to do, she tells her daughter that she is going to be sent to live with a female relative who will be able to care for her. They pack food and walk throughout the day, finally stopping to rest for the night. After the girl falls asleep, Barnes takes out her knife and slits her daughter's throat. She then tries to hang herself, but, according to the author, God does not allow her to succeed. When she fails, Satan convinces her to drown herself, but she fails at that too. As with most of the other child murderers, she immediately feels remorse and returns to town. She is found and confesses to the murder. The author of the pamphlet establishes his credentials when he goes to Newgate to question her and informs his readers that "none but the Devill alone tempted her"[150].

Elizabeth Hazard, the subject of *The Unnatural grand mother*, murders her grandchild after being influenced by the Devil. The mother of the murdered child sells fruit in the market and has just had a second child whom she takes out of London in an effort to find cheaper nursing. The grandmother and the devil plot ways to kill her other child, a toddler, until the grandmother realizes how horrendous the crime is and goes to sleep without harming the child. The devil awakens her and reminds her that her daughter now has two children and a "bad husband" who does not maintain them.[151] The grandmother is already in debt and it would only get worse if she had to maintain her daughter and grandchildren. The devil convinces her to kill her grandchild. She leaps out

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150 Goodcole, *Nature's Cruell Step-Dames*, 5.

151 Anon., *The Unnatural Grand Mother*, 6.

of bed "more like an infernal Hag, than the mother or grandmother of children," fearlessly snatches up the sleeping child and drowns it in a tub of water. She tries to make her escape, but God prevents it and causes her to show a maid what she has done. The maid opens a window and raises the hue and cry. Neighbours see the body and take the woman to a town alderman who examines her and holds her over in Newgate to await trial.[152]

The murder of this child does not happen quickly. After sending away her maid and taking the child from its nurse, the grandmother plots numerous ways to end its life. But, "her better Angels" convince her that the crime is too horrid to commit and she initially resists the Devil's temptation. However, having found a weakness, the devil continues to work on her until she can no longer withstand his pressure. Hazard does not give in easily, but like so many of the child killers portrayed in pamphlets, she does succumb to the pressures of poverty at the instigation of the devil.[153]

Anne Musket murders her young daughter after failing to resist the "poysoned baites" set by Satan.[154] The widow from the pamphlet *Murther Will Out*, kills her ill child after the Devil recognizes that she is alone and without support. This mother spends several nights wrestling with her conscience before committing the murder after being made a "slave" to Satan. He is with her everywhere she goes so that he becomes her only companion. Finally, she begins to "parley" with him which proves her final undoing

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152 Anon., *The Unnatural Grand Mother*, 7.

153 Anon., *The Unnatural Grand Mother*, 5.

154 Musket, *The much-afflicted Mothers Teares*.

because it prevents her from appealing to Christ for help.[155]

Margaret Vincent, whose story is told in *A Pittlesse Mother*, murders two of her three children because she succumbs to the 'dangers' of Catholicism. Vincent had been born into a good family and led a virtuous life. However, she began to explore other religions and became "charmed by heresy"[156]. In this way, the devil gained a foothold and was able to deceive her until she fully rejected the teachings of the Protestant Church. It is the devil who entices her to murder her children in order to save them from their father's beliefs. The woodcut on the front page makes the influence of the devil clear (See image 2). As with the image from the *Sundrye Strange Murthers* pamphlet, the devil is directly influencing the murderer, to the point of supplying the weapons of the children's death. This devil, however, is even more monstrous than the devil in Image 1. The fish scales, bird wings, and clawed hands and feet are monstrous, yet the devil's face still has the likeness of a man. This creature could masquerade as a human until he had accomplished his goal. The reader is shown the true nature of the devil, even as Margaret Vincent murders the children with no understanding of how she came to such a state.

Each of these women succumb to the temptations of the Devil, although neither Hazard nor the mother of the sick child give in easily. As with the men, these women are "unnatural" and "inhuman" because they commit child murder, not because they are women. As discussed earlier, some scholars speculate that the motive of pamphlet writers for using the Devil as a motivator for murder is to demonstrate the weak nature of

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155 Anon., *Murther will Out*, 3-4.

156 Anon., *A Pittilesse Mother*, 3.

women and to remove their agency. Susan Staub says that these narratives "function to regain control over the transgressive woman. Almost invariably they do so by depicting women as victims, thereby robbing them of the autonomy the writers find so threatening"[157]. However, Staub is here ignoring the pamphlets about men who are also portrayed as victims of the Devil. In reality, the pamphlets may be attempting to "regain control over the transgressive" child murderer, whether male or female.

Image 2. *A Pittilesse Mother*

The agency of women in seventeenth-century England is often discussed among

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Staub, *Stepdames*, 13.

scholars. Some contend that women were not given any agency in pamphlets and literature because that would have implied that they had a measure of power which would be dangerous.[158] While this is a plausible explanation, it does not hold up when we consider that the same descriptions are used in the pamphlets about male child murderers. We need to question why pamphleteers also portrayed men who succumbed to the Devil. If the motive was to remove agency, then that motive may have applied to men also.

This is important because it provides a new line of inquiry to pursue. While the fear of disorder is often used by scholars to explain many early modern behaviors, it is not always applicable.[159] However, looking closely at child murder pamphlets indicates that the fear of disorder may have been one reason for describing the Devil as seducer. Each of the men and women described thus far in this chapter is not said to have acted out of their own will, but that of the Devil. If, as scholars argue, agency was at issue, we can surmise that it was being removed from *both* men and women.

Why was this so important in these murder cases? The pamphlets themselves give us a clue. Along with the commonplace of the Devil, we find repeated references to the incidence of horrific crimes and to divine providence as a means for discovering those crimes. The author of *The Murderous Midwife* reminds his readers of "the (almost yearly) sad Examples of desperate and horrid Murderers, who for all their Craft, Artifices,

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Staub, *Stepdames*, 48; Clark, *Women and Crime*, 55.

159

Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: radical ideas during the English Revolution* (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984).

and Contrivances, to blind the Eye of Providence . . . never escaped discovery"[160]. The author of *An Exact Relation of The most bloudy and inhumane Murder committed by Miles Lewis and his wife* makes the connection even more clear when he says that "[t]he great and manifold Massacres and inhumane Murders that are now dayly complotted and enacted (by the Instruments of Sathan) in these our latter times, are almost innumerable"[161]. When describing the murders by Enoch ap Euan, the reader is told that such a horrid crime "hath scarce bin heard of, even amongst Miscreants and Infidells, O then how much more fearefull & remarkable to us, that it should be perpetrated amongst Christians"[162]. Crime pamphlets make the connection between violence and disorder clear, and numerous murder pamphlets remind readers that violence is the work of the Devil.

Connected to the fear of crime are the repeated references to divine providence in discovering both murders and the perpetrator. Malcolm Gaskill says that there was a universal belief that God exposed and punished murderers either directly or through

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Anon., *The Murderous Midwife, with her Roasted Punishment, being a true and full relation of a midwife that was put into an iron cage with sixteen wild-cats, and so roasted to death, by hanging over a fire, for having found in her house-of-office no less than sixty two children, at Paris in France* ([London: s.n.], Printed in the year 1673), 1.

161

Anon., *An Exact Relation of the most bloudy and inhumane Murder, committed by Miles Lewis and his wife , a pi[n]m[a]ker upon their prentice, dwelling in Barnsby-Street in S[o]uthwark. Wherein is declared, the manner of his cruell tortures, showing how he was whipt with rods of wire, and put to death with red-hot irons; the like never heard of before in any age. Also, the examination of this bloody woman before the Justice; with her charge and accusation, laid open against her. Witness [brace] John Newman, Jury-man of the Chaire. Thomas Walles, Stephen Robinson, Will. Robinson. Philip Henson [brace] All jury men* (London: Printed for J.C., Novemb. 30, 1646), 1.

162

More, *A True Relation of a barbarous and most cruell Murther*, 3.

agents. This served two purposes. First, it ensured that people were confident that criminal justice would prevail and, second, it provided proof of God's intervention in crime.[163] Murderers were sometimes discovered by strange means. When Master Caverly attempts to get to his third child in an attempt to kill it, his horse is "appointed by God to tie him from any more guilt, and to preserve the infants life, in a plaine ground, where there was scarce a pibble to resist his hast, the horse fell down" and ran from Caverly who was then apprehended.[164] The woman in the *Murderous Midwife* is found out when a neighbour has recurring dreams that the midwife is not what she seems because he had seen many young pregnant women enter the house, but few children come out. He tells some friends of his concerns and they cunningly arrange to have her house searched. They go to the privy first where they find the bodies of sixty-two infants.[165]

A mother and son who kill a three-year-old boy and attempt to kill his sister are found out in an even stranger manner. Neighbours, including a tailor, see two well-clothed children enter the Dell house, but do not see them leave. The tailor assumes they are safe and does not give them any further thought. Several days later the boy's body is found in a ditch of water, but cannot be identified. Eventually the tailor sees and recognizes the boy's coat; as a result Mother Dell and her son are questioned by the authorities, but they deny any knowledge of the boy. Although they are suspected of

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163 Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 203.

164 Anon., *Two Most unnaturall and bloodie Murthers*, 16.

165 Anon., *The Murderous Midwife*, 4-5.

committing murder, they do not confess and are released. According to the author, God was not yet ready to show the truth and so allows them to go free. Four years later a young girl is found with her tongue cut out.[166] She tries to tell her story through signs, but nobody understands her. Eventually God sends her back to the town where her brother was murdered. When she sees the Dell house, she sets up such a noise that she draws the attention of neighbours. The tailor sees her and remembers her and her brother. Eventually her hand signs are enough for the neighbours to determine that something had happened to her in the Dell house and she and the Dells are taken to the justice for questioning.[167] The justice jails the Dells and arranges for the girl to be looked after by townspeople. The pamphleteer then reminds his readers that they must not question God's miracles. In this case, God chooses a cock as his instrument. While the girl is playing with other children, a cock begins to crow and another answers. The two birds carry on for some time until the children begin to imitate them. Finally, with a great deal of effort, the girl herself does the same and then begins to speak. She is immediately taken to the justice and tells her story.[168] She, her brother, and her parents were traveling when a peddler and his wife killed her parents and robbed them. They took the children to the Dells and paid for their upkeep. The Dells decided to keep the money, but not the children, and murdered her brother and left her for dead. The Dells are sentenced to hang

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166 Anon., *The Horrible Murther of a young boy*, 2-3.

167 Anon., *The Horrible Murther of a young boy*, 4-5.

168 Anon., *The Horrible Murther of a young boy*, 8.

at the next assizes.

The importance of God's power in discovering both murders and the perpetrators cannot be overstated. In the case of the Dells, it "pleased God to reveale some of the Authors: and for some secrete purpose best knowe to himselfe, to conceale the rest"[169]. When he is ready, God will bring the peddler and his wife to justice. Caverly is caught because God causes his horse to stumble. The midwife would not have been discovered if a neighbour had not had strange dreams about her. One author tells his readers, "God seldome or never leaveth murther unpunished, nor will the marke of murther goe forth of the murtherers weapon, neither can murther bee kept so close, but that by one meanes or another the Lord will compel the murtherer to discover and laie open the truth unto the worlde"[170]. Pamphleteers repeatedly remind their readers that God is all-powerful and does not tolerate murder.

This is important for the discussion of why the Devil figures so prominently in many of these pamphlets. The continued references to Satan, in conjunction with the references to divine providence, are used, in part, to demonstrate God's ability to conquer Satan. Scholars who argue that the Devil seducing women in pamphlet literature demonstrates that seventeenth-century writers were determined not to give women agency, and so conferred it upon the Devil, are only recognizing part of the picture. Many murder pamphlets give the Devil credit for seducing the accused – including men. This suggests that writers were attempting to explain the existence of crime and to demonstrate

169

Anon., *The Horrible Murther of a young boy*, 9.

170

Anon., *Sundrye Strange and Inhumaine Murthers*.

God's power when the murderer is caught through divine intervention. Crime and violence could be explained because men and women did not act in accordance with God's will. According to Calvin, God gave these people over to Satan who was one of God's instruments of punishment. However, just because men and women were seduced by Satan did not mean that they were absolved of their sin, because God gave them the ability and tools to resist the Devil's temptations.[171] Thus, if God's people can resist Satan, they will not commit murder. Henry Goodcole, the author of *Nature's Cruel Step-Dames*, appends a lengthy discourse to the pamphlet on the dangers of neglecting true worship: if God's people do not rely on God for spiritual sustenance they will be tempted by the Devil. According to Goodcole: "a sinnefull weake man [is not] able to grapple with the powerfull strength of sinne and Satan"[172]. Goodcole does not single out women as being too weak to withstand the Devil's influence. He says that *nobody* can resist such a powerful creature. Furthermore, men become weak by ignoring God which further reinforces the importance of following the true religion.

Some scholars argue that the primary purpose of these pamphlets is to titillate the audience. However, if this were the case, there would be little to the pamphlets other than the gruesome details of the murder. Although the details of the crime are often told in great detail, this is rarely the only component of the pamphlets. One of the most common elements to these pamphlets is the confession narrative. Elizabeth Hare is

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Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14.

172

Goodcole, *Natures Cruell Step-Dames*, 10.

burned at the stake for high treason. Hare provides a surprising scaffold confession. Her crime is high treason, but she admits that many years earlier she had buried her newborn alive. Now, at the time of her death, her conscience will not allow her to remain silent any longer. She requests the prayers and forgiveness of both God and her fellow Christians. The import of this narrative is not the death of the child, but the scaffold confession which then allows the author to spend time explaining the dangers of sin. Elizabeth Hare's story is told to serve as an example, not to titillate the reader.[173]

The short lamentation by Anne Musket is the equivalent of a scaffold confession. The entire document relates how Musket forgot all of the good things about being a mother because she could not withstand Satan's traps.[174] Her remorse serves to act as a reminder to others not to be ensnared as she was. We have already discussed the story of Margaret Vincent who strangles her children because of her belief that she is saving them from the dangers of the Protestant religion. A large part of this pamphlet is taken up with the efforts of some townspeople to get Vincent to see that she is mistaken about which religion is false. Eventually, "her heart by degrees bec[omes] a little mollified, and in nature somewhat repentant for these her most heynous offences"[175]. Vincent comes to believe that she deserves death for her crime. Fortunately for Vincent, she does not

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Anon., *The True Narrative of the Confession and Execution of Elizabeth Hare which is burnt for high-treason, in Bun-Hill Fields on Tuesday the 30th. of this instant October 1683 But Sydley Vanderlyn had his Majesties most gracious reprieve* ([London: printed by E. Mallet, 1683]), 2.

174

Musket, *The much-afflicted Mothers Teares.*

175

Anon., *A pittilesse Mother.*

succeed in committing suicide, giving her the chance to ask for repentance and hope for eternal salvation. Thus, the true religion prevails and the reader is again reminded about the dangers of sin and false religion. Sandra Clark argues that some pamphlets use the Devil to suggest the "Puritan idea of spiritual combat" so that he can act as tempter against whom the woman has no defenses.[176] This is certainly evident in the Vincent story as Vincent spends several intense days wrestling with her beliefs until she finally comes to understand that she has been a victim of the Devil. However, as we have seen, it is not sufficient for scholars to claim that only women cannot withstand the Devil, or were not engaged in spiritual combat. Neither John Rowse nor Enoch ap Euan were strong enough to resist Satan's temptations and both committed murders of children.[177]

The conflation of the devil with divine providence and scaffold confessions all serve to strengthen the reader's belief in the efficacy of true faith. Each of these elements

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[176] Clark, *Women and Crime*, 40.

[177] There are many examples in crime pamphlets about men who murder adults at the instigation of the Devil. See for example: Anon., *The Bloody Butcher and the two wicked and cruel bawds: exprest in a woful narrative of one Nathaniel Smith a butcher, who lived in Maypole-Alley near the Strand; his wife having been all day in the market selling of meat, in the evening went with her husband to an ale-house, where they stay'd till ten of the clock. And then went home together, and being in their lodging, demanded of her the money she had taken that day, but she (being great with child and peevish) refused to give it him, he taking his butchers-knife in his hand stabb'd her in the back, whereof she instantly dyed, for which he was apprehended, condemned, and executed at Tyburne, April the 24th. 1667: As also another relation of a ravisher, who in a bawdy-house (assisted by two women) ravished a girle: The tune, The bleeding heart* (London: Printed by E. Crowch, for F. Coles, T. Vere, and J.Wright, [1667]); Anon., "The Murtherer's Lamentation: Being An Account of John Jewster and William Butler who were arraign'd and found guilty of the Robbery and Murther of Mrs. Jane Le grand; for which they received due Sentence of Death, and was accordingly Executed on the 19th day of this Instant July, in Spittlefields" in ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, *The Pepys Ballads*, 8 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931); and Anon., *A Briefe and True Relation of the Murther of Mr. Thomas Scott preacher of Gods word and Batchelor of Divinitie. Committed by John Lambert souldier of the garrison of Utricke, the 18. of June. 1626. With his examination, confession and execution* (London: Printed [by M. Flesher] for Nath. Butter, 1628).

play a role in edifying the reader about the goodness of God and his omnipotent power. Relying on Satan will only lead to downfall, whereas relying on God will lead to eternal salvation. According to Walsham, pamphleteers believed that these accounts were very effective in instilling lessons about morality and ethics.[178] Furthermore, these stories serve to remind the reader that ultimate power lies with God, not Satan. Examples of this can be seen in pamphlets where a child is out to nurse and so does not suffer death at the hands of its parent.[179] Ultimately, Satan can cause chaos, but he is unable to cause complete destruction because God will not allow it.

The purpose of the Devil in murder pamphlets is not as simple as removing agency from women, or from those, male or female, who upset the social order. Authors make it clear that both men and women commit violence at the behest of the Devil. They cannot resist his advances and eventually succumb to his temptations. The process is more complex than eliminating a woman's ability to think and act for herself. Rather, it appears as if the purpose was, in part, to remove agency from criminal men *and* women. Divine providence and the importance of repentance indicate that the ultimate ability to make decisions does not rest with man, but with God. Thus, humans in general, especially those who commit murder, do not have agency.[180] The ability to commit atrocious crimes comes from the Devil and the ability to turn away from sin comes with

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178 Walsham, *Providence*, 69.

179 Anon., *Two Most Unnaturall and Bloodie Murthers* and Anon., *A Pittilesse Mother*.

180 Sandra Clark says that human agency is secondary when the account is one of God's intervention, revelation, or providence. Clark, *Women and Crime*, 55.

God's help. Moreover, when the reader is reminded that God will reveal murder and its perpetrators when he decides that it is the right time, Satan's power is ultimately eliminated.

At first glance the notion of agency is contrary to the Protestant idea of providence in which history has been preordained by God, and so humanity does not have the ability to change the course of history. However, as discussed earlier, the ideal and reality often do not correspond to each other. Richard Godbeer argues that, "in practice Protestant teaching on the question of moral responsibility was ambiguous and open to misinterpretation: it could as easily justify locating the source of evil and sin outside as inside the self"[181]. Protestant writers were in a constant struggle to reconcile man's ability to change events and the concept of providence. Thus, when pamphlet writers highlighted God's intervention with miracles or strange happenings, they dictated that these events were not last minute intercessions by God, but fitted perfectly into the scheme he had already laid out: He willed changes in His creatures without deviating . . . from His original intentions"[182]. Additionally, providence did not relegate man to the role of puppet on the strings of a puppeteer, but gave men "moral autonomy"[183] which is where their susceptibility to the Devil was derived.

Studying pamphlets in which the Devil plays a role in influencing both men and

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Richard Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion: magic and religion in early New England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Cited in Walsham, *Providence*, 87.

182

Walsham, *Providence*, 13.

183

Walsham, *Providence*, 15.

women explains why scholars use the modern concept of agency to demonstrate that pamphleteers attempted to remove a woman's agency by conferring her ability to act onto the Devil. However, it is not sufficient to claim that part of what it meant to be female in seventeenth-century England meant that a woman could have no agency, especially in light of pamphlets which appear to remove agency from men - this would indicate that men in this period also lost their ability to act on their own.

Given the corresponding references to divine providence and God's willingness to expose crime and criminals, it is far more likely that the presence of the Devil served to remind readers that straying from the Protestant faith could lead to ruin. Repeated references to the dangers of Catholicism or of radical sects, along with biblical precedence indicate a concern that both men and women may not be able to resist the temptations of the Devil, not because they lacked the ability to do so, but because he was a powerful force which required supreme faith and perseverance to overcome.

Chapter Four:
Inside, Outside: The Spaces Inhabited by Child Murderers

Early feminist scholars argued for a sharp division between the 'private' space of the home and the 'public' spaces of the rest of society.[184] Within this paradigm, women remained within the home while men spent their time in the public world. Frances Dolan employs this model when discussing wives who kill their husbands. She argues that women who murdered their husbands increased fears that the home was not safe.[185] Dolan goes on to say that when women desecrated the home with violence, they served to "both reinforce the household as the sphere in which women act, and suggest that women were not only confined to the household but empowered within it"[186]. Using the public/private sphere model, Dolan sees the household as the "woman's sphere." However, more recent scholarship recognizes that the divide between the public and private may not have been as sharp as once thought and that lines were continuously crossed. In her discussion of Georgian civility, Amanda Vickery recognizes areas of influence which intersected the public and private.[187] Brettell and Sargeant point out that the public/private model is not always applicable in real situations, especially in societies

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In 1974 Michelle Rosaldo emphasized the dichotomy in an attempt to demonstrate the "universal subordination" of women. This restricts women's choices to creating their own public world or entering the male world. Michelle Z. Rosaldo, "Theoretical Overview," in Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Women, Culture, and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974). Cited in Caroline B. Brettell and Carolyn F. Sargeant, eds., *Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective* 2nd Edition (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997, 1993), 79.

185
Dolan, "Home-Rebels," 8.

186
Dolan, "Home-Rebels", 9.

187
Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (

where economic activities occurr within the home.[188] Early modern homes were often the locus of business activities, including weaving and spinning enterprises, which necessitated the opening of the private home to the public. Murder pamphlets tend to bear out this new way of thinking. While this chapter is a significant departure from the two previous chapters because it focuses on the daily lives of child murderers, it is included in this thesis as further evidence of the need to study seventeenth-century men and women together. These pamphlets demonstrate that the business of the home was not exclusively confined to husband and wife, nor were women's lives confined to the home. Furthermore, women did not commit murder only within the home and men did not restrict their crimes only to the public world. Rather, men and women interacted on a daily basis in all aspects of contemporary life; pamphlet authors did not represent either gender or the spaces inhabited by men and women as fixed, but as fluid.

Of the twenty-two pamphlets about women who committed child murder, four of them occur outside of the home. In turn, seven of the pamphlets about men who kill children happen within the home. In order to determine the way the home is portrayed in these accounts, I will investigate the home as described by pamphleteers. In many cases, the home itself is nothing more than a setting for murder. However, we occasionally find evidence that Amanda Vickery's model may be more accurate, and we can learn a great deal about the ways in which men and women negotiated both public and private spaces. Moreover, murder pamphlets can allow us to study whether there was a threat to gender roles when the 'private' and 'public' spheres intersected.

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[188] Brettell and Sargeant, *Gender*, 80.

The pamphlet account of Master Caverly, discussed in a previous chapter, also contains information about seventeenth-century conceptions of the home and the roles of men and women within the family structure. Caverly has a yearly stipend of eight hundred pounds from his family estate and lives a comfortable life. Through dissolute living, he squanders his estate and goes into debt to a number of people. His unhappiness begins to affect his family until his anger grows to the point where it causes his wife to approach him and ask what she can do to help bring peace back into their home. After discussing the problem, she agrees to go to London to sell her dowry and give the funds to her husband so he can pay his creditors and protect his land. While in London, she is approached by her uncle and former guardian who questions her about the stories he has heard about Caverly's behavior and financial difficulties. She denies that anything is wrong in order to protect her husband. However, her uncle already knows the condition of Caverly's estate and offers to protect Caverly from his creditors and provide money as needed until Caverly matures and begins to look after his affairs himself. Thinking that this will solve their financial and, thus, their familial difficulties, she returns home with her dowry intact.[189] Note that Caverly's wife is conducting business affairs on behalf of her family. She does not quietly sit back and watch while her family is destroyed, but is proactive and takes the steps she sees as necessary to protect it, first, by approaching her husband and offering any assistance she can provide, and, secondly, by going to London herself to sell her jewels and then making financial arrangements with a family member.

Margery Wolf points out the value of family links: when women married they left

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Anon., *Two most unnaturall and bloody Murthers*.

one family group for another. The resulting connection between the two families was important and was often managed by the woman herself.[190] The pamphlet author gives no indication that this is in any way unusual. Rather, he says Caverly's wife is a gentlewoman who has done nothing to deserve Caverly's wrath. When she admonishes her husband to curtail his spending, the author makes the reader understand that she is doing it out of love for Caverly and to protect her family. The author does not chastise her and tell the reader that her words and actions are the cause of the strife or accuse her of being a scold. Rather, she is portrayed as trying to preserve the home even as Caverly destroys it.

While his wife is in London, Caverly grows angrier and tells his neighbours that she is a "strumpet" and his children "bastards." However, people know her reputation as a virtuous woman and condemn Caverly for his words. One man who knew her from birth duels with Caverly over the accusations. Caverly is wounded, but the man shows mercy and lets him go with these words: "Maister Caverly, you are a Gentleman of an antient house, there hath been much good expected from you, deceyve not mens hopes; you have a vertuous wife, bee kinde unto her." Caverly, however, blames his wife for both his wounds and his financial difficulties. When she returns home with her dowry intact and the news of her uncle's offer, he accuses her of conspiring with people to take his land

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Margery Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992). Cited in Caroline B. Brettell and Carolyn F. Sargeant, eds., *Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective* 2nd Edition (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997, 1993), 85. Although Wolf's discussion is not about early modern England, her point is still valid. When women move from one home to another, they do not completely sever ties between the families, but consolidate them and, in effect, cause the family network to expand.

away.[191] During these events neither Caverly nor his neighbours see fit to maintain even the semblance of the privacy of the home. Neighbours and family members freely give advice and admonishment when they see bad behavior. Furthermore, Caverly is not permitted to verbally abuse his wife without repercussions. There is no assumption that women in general are immoral or the only cause of strife within or without the home. Rather, it is an individual's behavior – in this case the husband's – that is the root of trouble. It appears as if the author of this pamphlet believes that wives are capable of repairing damage caused by their husbands.

After the confrontation with Caverly, his wife goes to a separate chamber to sleep. It is at this point in the narrative that Caverly understands what he has done to endanger the future of his children. When his son enters the room, his rage erupts and he stabs the boy. He then goes into the chamber where is wife lies sleeping and a maid is dressing a younger child by the fire. It is then that Caverly murders the maid, his two children, and injures his wife. The author of the pamphlet lets us know what the victims were doing when the violence begins: his wife is asleep in her bed and the maid is by the fire.[192] This is a picture of domesticity and safety which is violently disrupted. A bed chamber is the very core of a home and marriage where the occupants should be safest. Stories such as this one need to be examined by scholars who argue that women who committed murder in the home or who murdered family members were more feared because they highlighted women's authority within the home. Arguably, pamphlets describing men in similar

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Anon., *Two most unnaturall and bloody Murthers*.

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Anon., *Two most unnaturall and bloody Murthers*.

circumstances demonstrate that there was a general fear of disturbing the order of the household which was at the center of social and political order. The strictures of patriarchy applied to men as well as women and it was recognized that men could disrupt order within both the home and the state. This pamphlet does not fit the model of woman as disrupter of the household. Rather, it paints a picture of the wife as a preserver of order.

Another pamphlet in which a father murders his children, *Bloody News from Devonshire*, portrays a good family. The wife is wealthy when the couple marries and they raise their children in comfort. However, the Devil causes discord between the couple and their home becomes filled with "quarrels and strife"[193]. One day he comes home with "his Countenance fiery, stern and furious," and his wife quickly flees to a neighbour's for shelter. After failing to catch her, he returns home and then murders his children.

In this account we are first shown a picture of domesticity that follows the dominant ideal. The home is managed by parents who have the financial means to support it comfortably. The children are raised with "care and good education." Owing to attention to spiritual details, the family is rewarded in material things.[194] While the home itself is not described here, the family that resides in the home is. While we cannot definitively know the author's motives for choosing to include a description of domesticity, we can speculate as to why the author felt it was important to demonstrate the goodness of this

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193 Anon., *Bloody News from Devonshire*, 2.

194 Anon., *Bloody News from Devonshire*, 1.

family. One of the foundations of seventeenth-century society was a stable home. Society based on familial stability would be politically stable. By emphasizing the good that came to this family who upheld that ideal and contributed to the stability of the nation, the author can remind his readers that they too can contribute to the state and be rewarded for it. He then contrasts this with the horrors of allowing the devil to influence either the husband or wife - in this case the husband - into allowing that stability to disintegrate. For unknown reasons, this man succumbs to the devil and turns on his family. The result is chaos and disorder.

Caverly lives a similarly comfortable life. His father had died before he reached the age of majority and so he is raised under the care of a "most noble & worthy gentlemen in this land" until he gains the reputation of being a virtuous man. Eventually the best families seek to arrange a marriage between him and their daughters. A match is made and both Caverly and his intended are happy. However, the families agree that the marriage should not go ahead until Caverly reaches the age of majority. He resents this and departs for London where he meets and marries another woman. However, soon after this marriage takes place his disposition changes and he squanders his estate. As described earlier, he too turns on his family.[195]

These two accounts provide us with different pictures of the home. While the Devonshire family is financially stable, money is clearly not enough to maintain a home. We are told how a family should behave and the result of the failure to maintain the home. Caverly's family is financially destitute. The author attributes Caverly's rage to

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Anon., *Two most unnaturall and bloody Murthers.*

his financial situation and paints a very different picture of family life. This family is distressed to the point that Caverly's wife approaches him and asks what she can do to bring peace to the home. Yet, unlike the Devonshire account, the home itself is portrayed. While the family is not peaceful, the home is: at the time of the murders, Mistress Caverly is sleeping and a maid sits by the fire with a child. The older child freely goes to his father and implores Caverly not to be troubled. Despite the turmoil of the people, it is still possible for the home itself to contain places of peace. It is not until these fathers disrupt that peace that their ideal families are shattered.

John Rowse also squanders his money until he reduces his family to poverty. Rowse made a good income as a fishmonger and married a "very honest and comely woman" with whom he lived a happy life until he took a servant as his mistress. After his wife's death, he remarries but continues his affair. Eventually he and the maid leave and he does not return for some time. When he returns to England he is welcomed home by his family. He realizes that he has left his family with no means of sustenance and resolves to free his children from the strictures of poverty. After sending his wife to London on an errand, Rowse goes into a bedchamber where the "innocent" children are sleeping. While the home itself is not described within the text, the woodcut from the front cover can tell us some things about it (see figure 3). The advantages that the creator of the woodcut thought Rowse had are apparent in this figure. This is a substantial home with a spring with such clear water that "Queen Elizabeth of famous memory would dayly send for it for her owne use"[196]. This was a home where a family could live in

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196 Anon., *The Unnaturall Father*.

peace and comfort.

Figure 3. *The Unnaturall Father*

There are a few things of note here in relation to the home. First, both the husband and wife are expected to maintain the home. Failure to do so leads to the shame of poverty or disruption of the household. Second, as with Caverly's wife, Rowse's wife also conducts family business in London - she is not confined to her home or the village. Third, each of the fathers discussed in this chapter kill their children within the home. This is important because it demonstrates that unruly fathers could cause as much disorder as unruly mothers. Thus, we must question whether pamphlets about disorderly women are castigating women specifically, or disorder in general.

This pamphlet also demonstrates a father's role in the family. The raising of

children was generally the responsibility of mothers while fathers provided financially, but we can see that fathers also took responsibility for their children. When Rowse sends his wife off on the errand, there is no question about whether someone should be brought in to care for the children in her absence. Yet, this family had outside help: after Rowse murders his children, a woman comes into the house and uses the spring to do the household laundry, with the help of Rowse himself. Clearly this family could hire help when it was needed, but there is no mention that it is unusual for Rowse to care for his children or to assist in household chores. There is no suggestion that his masculinity is threatened by these actions; he is not characterized as effeminate or lacking in masculine qualities.[197] These pamphlets demonstrate that the home is as much the sphere of men as it is of women and that conceptions of gender roles changed as the situation warranted it.

Child murder pamphlets also show scholars the ways in which women carried out their familial duties. As discussed earlier, both Caverly's and Rowse's wives go to London to take care of family business. Caverly's wife is interesting given what we know about seventeenth-century dowries and the concept of the *feme covert*.[198] Notice that Mistress Caverly offers her dowry to her husband. Normally, this dowry would have become Caverly's property at the time of their marriage and his wife would have no legal

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Early modern writings are rife with examples of masculinity being questioned. For excellent studies see Shepherd, *Meanings of Manhood*; Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: honour, sex, and marriage* (London and New York: Longman, 1999); and Kuohta, *The Three-piece Suit*. When pamphlet authors accept men such as John Rowse who carries out chores traditionally seen as feminine, they are demonstrating an ambiguity about contemporary gender roles.

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Seventeenth-century women did not control their finances unless special arrangements had been made by family members. The *feme covert*, or married woman, did not have legal rights over her earnings or inherited property. Mendelson and Crawford, *Women*, 38.

right either to offer it to her husband or to withhold it from him: his control over it was absolute. While we do not know the circumstances of this dowry, it is possible that her guardian made arrangements to protect some property from Caverly which would give Mistress Caverly the right to withhold it from her husband and offer it to him if and when she saw fit to do so.

Murder pamphlets also give us a glimpse into the financial situation of early modern women. As is to be expected, pamphlets about unwed mothers who murder their children, generally ascribe their inability to maintain an illegitimate child as a motive for murder. In this particular circumstance, poverty is to be expected as the prospects of financial security were tenuous in the best circumstances for unmarried women. However, we are also provided with examples of women who do manage to provide for their children. Generally these are widows whose morality is not called into question by pamphleteers. Their motives for murder are significantly different than those for women such as Martha Scambler who throws her illegitimate newborn into the privy to die.

The widow in the pamphlet *Murder Will Out* supports herself and her sickly child. According to the author, she is confident in her ability to maintain her child after the death of her husband through hard work. She hopes that her child will prove to be a comfort to her in her old age and resolves to do what she must to provide financially. She works long hours and manages to generate enough income to provide the necessities of life. Unfortunately, her child is ill and requires extra care from doctors which takes a large portion of her income.[199] This however, is not what proves to be her final undoing.

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[199] Anon., *Murther Will Out*, 2.

Rather, as discussed earlier, it is the influence of the devil who steps in when he sees potential weakness and convinces her to commit an act against God and man. Although this mother eventually succumbs to the Devil, the importance of the pamphlet for this discussion lies in her initial ability to provide financially for her family in potentially disastrous circumstances. After the death of her husband, this mother does not go on poor relief. There is no indication that her husband provided for her financially with even a small inheritance. Rather, she immediately begins work to support her family. The author of the pamphlet does not see anything unusual in a woman providing financial support, but there is a measure of praise when he says that she "work[s] her fingers to the bone"[200]. Neither her gender nor her role in society are questioned by either her desire nor her ability to work. She is not confined to the home, but is both permitted to and expected to work. Presumably this is in part because parishes did not want more people on parish support. Thus, everybody who could do so was expected to support their families financially. This certainly belies the argument that women were expected to remain in the home and that their gender status was threatened by their emergence into the public world of work.[201]

In addition to demonstrating the ideal home and family and the disruption caused by

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Anon., *Murther Will Out*, 2.

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Among ballads, there is also the example of Alice Davis who commits petty treason after her husband demands her earnings. She does not feel her husband has the right to require her to hand the funds over and murders him when he does not back down. Presumably, she felt that she had control over her earnings. Anon., *The unnaturall Wife: Or, The lamentable Murther, of one goodman* Davis, *Lockesmith in Tutle-streete, who was stabbed to death by his Wife, on the 29 of* June, *1628. For which fact, She was Araigned, Condemned, and Adjudged to be Burnt to Death in* Smithfield, *the 12 July 1628* (Printed at London for M.T. Widdow).

disorder, child murder pamphlets give historians insight into the role of neighbours. The community plays a key function in discovering concealed child murder and regularly interferes in 'private' household affairs.[202] When Caverly neglects his financial duties, the community knows the affairs of his home. Mistress Caverly's uncle informs his niece that he is aware of the state of Caverly's finances and offers to assist him in mending them. Additionally, Caverly's brother had acted as guarantor of some of Caverly's debts: when they go unpaid the brother is confined to jail. Although this is a family matter, the head of Caverly's brother's school approaches Caverly and pleads with him to take care of the debt so that his brother can be released.[203] There is no hint that the community should stay out of 'private' affairs: rather, it appears normalized that outsiders intervene when they think the situation warrants it.

When the father from Devonshire goes too far in his violence towards his wife, their "honest" neighbours "undert[ake] the good Office of reconciling them to their former good understanding"[204]. They are unsuccessful in their efforts, but continue to offer assistance where they can, going so far as to offer the wife shelter when she requires it. Their interference does not prevent the death of the children, but ensures that the father is unsuccessful in his attempt to commit suicide and guarantees that he will stand trial.

In the account of a midwife who is suspected child murder, neighbours are essential

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In fact, if neighbours did not raise the hue and cry in light of a crime, they were held responsible for allowing the criminal to escape. J.M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England 1660-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 37.

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Anon., *Two most unnaturall and bloodie Murthers*, 11.

204

Anon., *Bloody News from Devonshire*, 2.

in uncovering the crime. This midwife runs her business out of her home and is apparently reputable and sought out for her expertise. Her clients range from the "Countrey-Gentry" to those of "meaner Quality"[205]. While many children are born healthy and return home with their families, some come to her with "worser intentions than for á safe delivery" and many children disappeared. The woman is successful at her business at amasses a great deal of wealth. She is discovered when a man who lives nearby is disturbed by dreams that the midwife's business is suspicious. He had seen a large number of young women enter the home and was aware that they had given birth to live infants. However, there were rarely children living at the home or sent out to nurse. He told some friends of his concerns and they decided together that there was cause to be suspicious. In order to gain entrance to the midwife's house, the neighbours concoct a story that one of them had lost some valuables, and so get a warrant to search the neighbourhood. In order to allay the midwife's suspicions, they start with other houses until they get to their ultimate destination. They begin their search of her home at the privy where they find the remains of at least sixty-two infants.[206] The intervention of these neighbours is essential in discovering the murders.

There is also the account of Martha Scambler who gives birth to an illegitimate son. Scambler, an unmarried woman, gives birth in secret and throws the boy's body into the

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Anon., *The Murderous Midwife, with her Roasted Punishment: Being a True and Full Relation of a Midwife that was put into an Iron Cage with Sixteen Wild-Cats, and so Roasted to Death, by hanging over a Fire, for having found in Her house-of-office no less than Sixty two Children, at Paris in France* (1673), 3.

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Anon., *The Murderous Midwife*, 4-5.

privy. When the body is found, "substantial" women of the neighbourhood are dispatched to look for the mother. They search potential suspects until they confront Scambler who eventually confesses to the murder.[207] As this crime occured prior to the 1624 statute, it would have been difficult to get a conviction against Scambler if she had not confessed when confronted.[208] As in other cases, neighbours are crucial in discovering both the body of the infant and the mother who murdered it.

There is no indication on the part of pamphlet authors that neighbours should stay out of the 'private' business of other people. Rather, they are often God's instruments in discovering hidden child murder. They enter homes and conduct bodily searches with the approval of the community. They assist neighbours who are in distress and interfere in marriages in attempts to reconcile couples. There is no 'private' world in which women are to be isolated. In fact, when another midwife, Madame Crompton, isolates herself from her community, the pamphlet author chastises her for her behaviour. Although she serves "Persons of Quality," she apparently does not conduct her business within her home, for she leaves in her carriage every morning.[209] In all the time she has lived in the village, she remains private, "not in the least associating herself with any of the Neighbourhood, or coming to Church." Despite the fact that her maid spends some time in conversation with other maids in the neighbourhood, she would "never communicate

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207 For a discussion on the implications of bodily searches, see Gowing, "Secret Birth."

208 Anon., *Deeds Against Nature*.

209 Anon., *The Cruel Midwife Being a True Account of a most Sad and Lamentable Discovery that has been lately made in the Village of Poplar in the Parish of Stepney* (London: Printede for R. Wier at the White Horse in Fleet-Street, 1693), 3.

any thing of her Mistresses Domestick Affairs." Furthermore, "the Midwife herself was scarce ever seen in the Neighbourhood, not so much as to stand at the Door"[210]. This woman keeps her business "so private and obscure" that neighbours do not even know how many children are being maintained within the home.[211] It is apparent that this woman's isolation from the community is suspicious. While 'gossips' are perceived to be disruptive,[212] there is clearly an expectation here that some community interaction is desired. By isolating herself from her neighbours, Crompton makes herself an object of distrust and falls under suspicion. Presumably, the role of the community in these endeavors is an important part of social stability.

These pamphlets clearly belie the public/private model of studying seventeenth-century men and women. The private spaces of the home intersected with the public spaces of the rest of society. There was no attempt to maintain even the semblance of privacy and neighbours and family members frequently intervened in family business. Women moved outside of the home and conducted business affairs on behalf of their husbands. Men remained within the home and committed murder within the home. They were both accused of neglecting their familial duties, leading to disorder and the destruction of the family.

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210 Anon., *The Cruel Midwife*, 3.

211 Anon., *The Cruel Midwife*, 4.

212 Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 52.

Conclusion

Seventeenth-century murder pamphlets are a rich source of information for historians. While unreliable as factual sources, the representations of murderous men and women provide scholars with a glimpse into the ways such people were perceived. Additionally, as this study demonstrates, the pamphlets give us insight into gender constructions of seventeenth-century England. If scholars are willing to read these sources "against the grain" they will find an invaluable source for early modern cultural studies.

Scholars working with concepts that have developed out of feminist studies of the 1970's, such as queer theory and gender theory, have contributed invaluable studies which have expanded our understanding of the seventeenth century. Particularly important for this thesis is the scholarship which examines gender constructions. This scholarship has enabled us to appreciate the ways in which men and women understood themselves and their roles in contemporary society. While not negating the value of this work, this paper argues for a greater integration in the studies of men and women in order to clarify conclusions reached by recent work.

Studies which focus on women have reached valuable conclusions about what it meant to be a woman in early modern England. Female child murderers reinforced the notion of women as something "other" than men. The implication is that women were not human simply because of their gender. Yet, pamphlet literature clearly indicates that gender was not sufficient to classify a person as inhuman or monstrous. The language used in these pamphlets applies to *both* male and female child murderers. Unnatural,

barbarous, and horrid were all used to describe men and women who committed an act which was incomprehensible to most people. In order to try to explain this behaviour, pamphleteers resorted to classifying child murderers as marginal to Christian society. Thus, these people were likened to savages and animals whose uncontrollable natures led them to commit murder.

Seventeenth-century studies have illustrated the importance of women acting as the ideal mother and wife. Yet, the pamphlets considered for this thesis demonstrate that men also had restrictions placed upon their behaviour. While women were more likely to be targeted for failure to maintain a high level of sexual morality than men, men also were spoken of in negative terms for neglecting to act in appropriate ways. John Rowse's first wife dies of a broken heart after he openly takes a maid as his mistress.[213] John Bartram is a man whose "wanton words, thoughts, and actions" lead him to betray the trust of his guardianship and get a young woman under his care pregnant.[214] In his printed confession, he blames himself for the death of their child, not the woman. Nor is the morality of the woman directly called into question, although it is implied by the simple fact of her pregnancy out of wedlock. These pamphlets focus on the moral laxity of the fathers involved, rather than the women. Women were indeed held to a higher standard, but that did not exonerate men who behaved in "lewd" ways.

Agency is a concept applied to the past, although scholars must be cautious about placing too much emphasis on it in this period. Some historians have argued that the

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213 Anon., *The Unnaturall Father*.

214 Anon., *The Araignment of Hypocrisie*

Devil appears in the lives of female child murderers so that pamphlet authors could ensure that women were not given the ability to act on their own. While this argument is plausible, it needs further scrutiny. The Devil is tied up with divine providence and exhortations to follow the 'true' faith. If we focus solely on pamphlets related to female child murderers, it is much easier to come to the conclusion that men in the seventeenth century refused to allow women to act on their own volition. However, including accounts of men who committed the same crime, indicate that the devil is used just as forcefully in these stories. Thus, the question of agency needs to be expanded to include men. It is apparent that men who committed child murder were just as dangerous as women who did so. If agency is the reason for the inclusion of Satan, then it is not sufficient to claim that men were attempting to negate the power of women. Rather, we must conclude that the goal was to remove the ability to act independently from God from transgressive men *and* women.

However, the inclusion of divine providence in these accounts indicates that the role God plays is very important. The Protestant concept of predestination is a critical part of this discussion because it may better explain the presence of the devil in child murder pamphlets. One of the difficulties in claiming that agency was important to pamphleteers is the concept that God had preordained history and that man had no part in changing it. However, as Alexandra Walsham demonstrates, early modern authors realized that there was a conflict with the concept of predestination and the ability of man to act on their own free will rather than as disempowered puppets at the mercy of an unseen entity. In order to reconcile these opposing ideas, early modern Protestant thinkers explained the

apparent conflict by claiming that events in which man appeared to play a role were, in fact, part of God's larger plan. Therefore, man did have the ability to succumb to Satan because they had "moral autonomy" which allowed humanity to act on their own. Rather than emphasize the lack of female agency, the appearance of the Devil arguably highlights the need for seventeenth-century society to adhere to the tenets of true faith, that is, Protestantism. Succumbing to the Devil was not reserved for women alone, but for those who, for various reasons, strayed from true piety and committed horrible acts.

Other scholarship has highlighted the importance of the divide between male and female spaces and place the woman firmly within the home. In this model, men inhabited the spaces of economy and politics, while women were relegated to playing out their lives within the home. Child murder pamphlets give us surprising insights into the private lives of men and women. Clearly the home was not a private place. In a society where business was often carried out within the home, it is impossible to claim that privacy could be maintained. Furthermore, we see numerous instances in these pamphlets where neighbours intervene in the lives of families. There is no indication that this is unnatural or unexpected. Rather, in the case of Mary Cook, her actions are attributed, in part, by the lack of interference of her neighbours. The community was also key in discovering hidden neonatal murders and in bringing murderers to justice.

We can also get a glimpse into the ideal home in the seventeenth century. It was a place of peace where family members treated each other well. Education and spiritual health were emphasized and the result of failing to maintain the ideal was disorder. Both men and women were expected to maintain the physical, spiritual, and financial welfare

of the home. In cases such as that of John Rowse, who plays a role in child minding and chores such as laundry, there is no indication that his masculinity is threatened. Similarly, when Mistress Caverly travels to London in an attempt to resolve her family's financial difficulties, the pamphleteer does not claim that she has overstepped her feminine role by taking on male duties. Rather, she is commended for attempting to maintain peace in the face of her husband's unreasonable behaviour. Women who worked outside of the home were doing what was necessary to support their families and were not castigated for doing so.

Child murder pamphlets themselves do not appear to be gendered. That is, they did not focus exclusively on either male or female behaviours: when discussing women who committed child murder, both public and private spaces are part of the account. Pamphleteers did not relegate men and women to separate areas. Neither did they restrict their accounts to those areas which have traditionally been exclusively male or female: women were part of the economic life of their families, and men were included in the physical maintenance of the home. Additionally, both men and women are discussed in similar ways and are driven to child murder by the same social pressures. Arguably, what we learn about seventeenth-century gender constructions in these pamphlets indicates that scholarship needs to move towards an integration in the study of genders, because these sources demonstrate a contradiction in current scholarship and the representation of child murderers.

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which fact he was hanged at Sandwich upon Wednesday the 27th day of April last, 1653. The other the murther of Richard Langly, of the same parish, whose blood also (as is here shewed) cryed against the said Mr. Sprackling, written by one that lives neer the place where the said murthers were committed, and was present at Mr. Sprackling's tryall; and published for the warning, and good of all. May 13. 1653. Imprimatur, Edm. Calamy. London: Printed by Tho. Warren, 1653.

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